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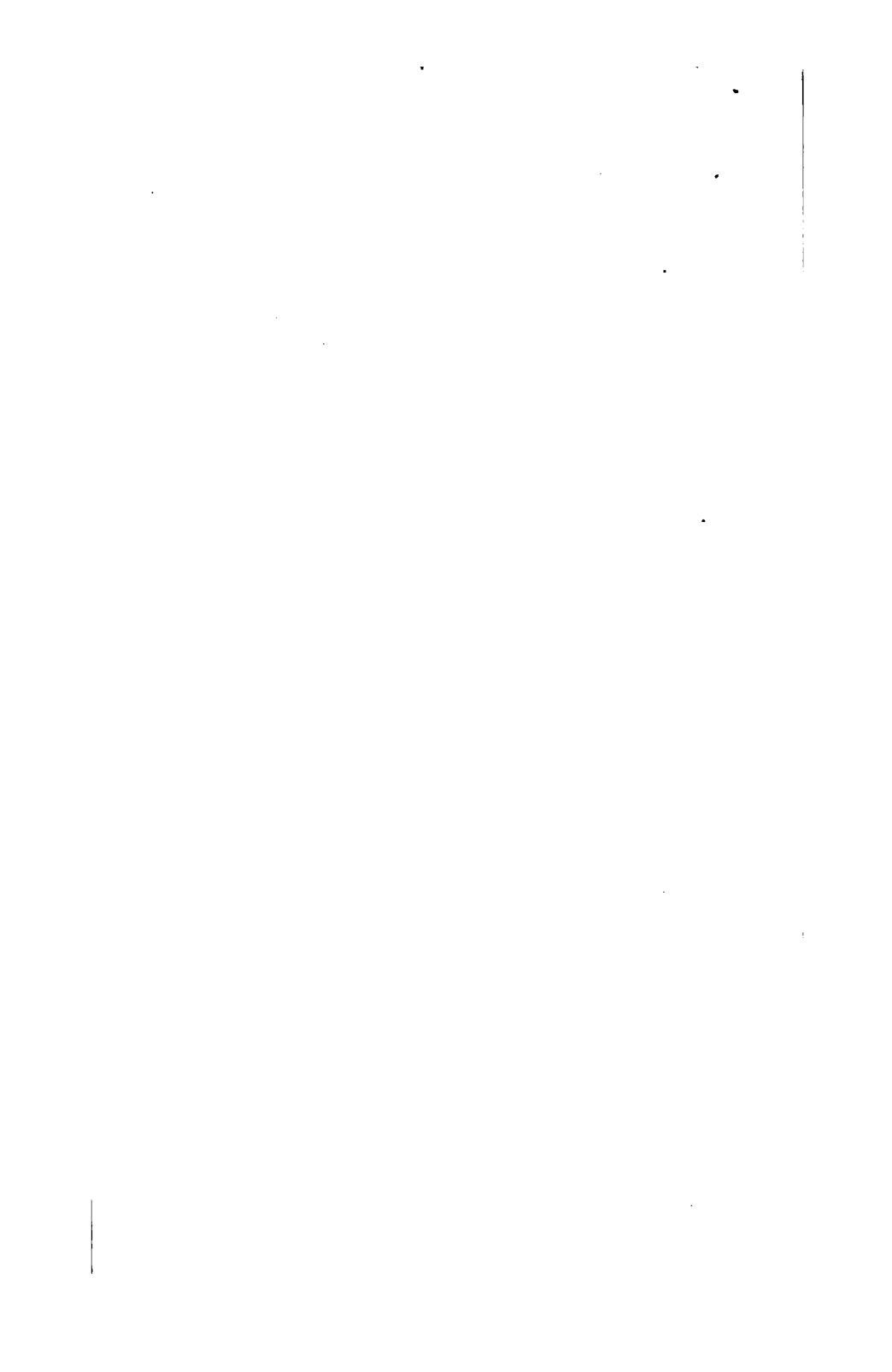
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\\ MEN OF CAPITAL. //

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF

"THE BANKER'S WIFE," "PEERS AND PARVENUS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

\\ VOL. I. //

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1846. //

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Shapleigh fund

Frederick Shoberl, Junior, Printer to His Royal Highness Prince Albert,
51, Rupert Street, Haymarket, London.

P R E F A C E.

Few will deny that the age we live in is the age of Money-worship ; or that, foremost among the votaries of Mammon, are our own country-people. In Great Britain, however vehement the disputes between High Church and Low, the Molten Calf remains the predominant idol.

That this passion for gold constitutes a fertile source of national greatness, is equally indisputable. But for our appetite for enrichment, our colonies had never been founded, our foreign enterprises never attempted. Mephitic climates had not been braved or perilous seas navigated, in order to extract from

more favoured soils the precious products denied to our northern clime. If content, like the indolent Italians, with the enjoyment of unsophisticated nature, or absorbed, like the cloud-skimming Germans, in intellectual speculations, India had not been conquered or Australia civilized ; whereas, the lust of gold, which defies the fevers of Sierra Leone and the knives of the Bush Rangers, has placed the island, of such small account

in the Commentaries Cæsar writ,

foremost in the rank of European powers.

But the passions advantageous to a nation, may be injurious to an individual. Ambition and Money-love, if they tend to ennoble a country, reduce to insignificance the human particles of which the nation is composed. In their pursuit of riches, the English are gradually losing sight of higher characteristics. In every political contest, whether for the

maintenance of parliamentary influence in the shape of rotten boroughs, or of high rent under the name of the Corn Laws, the claws of Avarice become frightfully apparent. Our pursuit of railway bubbles, and every other frantic speculation of the hour, affords sufficient evidence of the craving after capital superseding every better aspiration, whether for this world or the next.

The very sound of a sum in millions tickles the ear of an Englishman!—He loves it so much, indeed, that it all but reconciles him to the National Debt; and, when applied to private proprietorship, it secures deference for lowness of mind, birth, habits, and pursuits. No man so rich, but endeavours to become richer:—the fine gentleman, by gambling on the turf or the hazard-table,—the country gentleman, by theoretical farming,—the man of business, by speculation.

All that part of the population which is not occupied in toiling for its bread, consecrates its time and intellects to the alchemic enterprise of converting silver into gold.

One of the chief causes which renders this pursuit a bitterer as well as more pardonable struggle in England than on the Continent, is the unequal and capricious distribution of family property. The abolition, by the Code Napoleon, of the law of primogeniture, was one of the most effective aids ever afforded towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number ;—the foreign countries where this reform prevails being secure against the demoralizing spectacle of the younger sons of the nobility, reared in the enjoyment of luxury, and turned adrift, on attaining man's estate, to gratify, at the cost of other people, the factitious appetites they have acquired ;—for no species of honest industry enables a poor

honourable to supply himself with a tithe part of the comforts which, so long as he abided under his father's roof, it would have been a reproach to him had he failed to enjoy.—

But it is not alone the creation of *majorats* for the maintenance of the Order which, in its turn, confers benefits on the country, that tends to produce a class of strugglers after enrichment to maintain themselves on a level with their caste.—Country gentlemen and professional men,—nay, men without the pretension of being gentlemen,—are scarcely less smitten with the mania of creating “an eldest son,” to the exclusion and degradation of their younger children ; and by the individuals thus defrauded by their nearest and dearest, is the idolatry of Mammon pursued with least regard to self-respect or the rights of their fellow-creatures. Injured, they injure in their

turn. Their days are devoted to a campaign for the recovery of their birthright. Interested marriages, shabby bargains, and political jobbery, may often be traced to the vile system of things which converts the elder son into a Dives, and makes a Lazarus of his brother.

The first of the two following stories is related nearly in the terms in which it was told me by one of the actors in a drama sadly illustrative of the evil influence of mercenary motives. But, lest the title should appear to elevate a mere narrative of facts into the exemplification of an exclusive principle, a second tale is subjoined, exhibiting the Man of Capital in his nobler phases, as well as the difficulties arrayed against his progress in his seemingly velvet career.—

The inhabitants of a metropolis like London, where speculators occasionally ascend by

a single stride from the counter to the gorgeous palace of Aladdin, may deny the truth of the picture. But more than one country neighbourhood will have to confess that little exaggeration has been used in delineating the opposition of its ancient county families to the intrusion and wholesome innovations of a MAN OF CAPITAL.

THE
MAN OF CAPITAL;
OR,
INTEREST AND PRINCIPLE.

CHAPTER I.

L'amitié vient sans qu'on y songe. Elle se forme insensiblement, et s'affirme avec les années : et les vrais amis le sont longtemps, avant de s'aviser d'en prendre le nom.

ROUSSEAU.

If it were solely of my own adventures I had to tell, not even the flattering proposition I have received would induce me to throw myself personally on the compassion of the reader. But the history of another is closely interwoven with my own—the history of one whom, at various epochs of his life, the world has been pleased to love and honour ;—first, as a capital fellow, and lastly, as a man of capital.

It was at Eton I first became acquainted with Barty Brookes.

"My name is Bartholomew," said he; answer to an inquiry which I addressed him on the subject. "But it puts people in mind of Smithfield, a fair, and an hospital while 'Barty' sounds so like 'Bertie,' that it will pass for a relation of Lord Abingdon's, and will come off all the better with the Dons."

By this, it will be seen that Barty had already an eye to his interests. He was, in fact, compelled to have a care of them; for who else cared a straw about the matter? Barty was, like myself, a younger brother, and, like myself, an orphan.

He had become one, indeed, so short after his birth, that his notions of family affection were as imaginative as those of an Andover-Union pauper of a sirloin of beef. During his preparatory school-days, he had indulged in a vague notion that some boys were born of parents, and some of guardians

like the Hindoo castes, emitted by the head or feet of Bramah ; or, rather, that guardian was the name expressive in the English language of a bad father, as the French word *marâtre* of a savage stepmother. Instead of describing *his* by the touching phrase in which the painter Raphael used to address his guardian, "*Carissimo quanto padre*," he was never known to call him otherwise than "the old hunks."

By degrees, he learned to modify the appellation ; for he saw that, in the case of his elder brother, Sir Robert Brookes, only a year older than himself and subjected to the same guardianship, there was reason to invest the office with all the tenderness of paternity. Any one might see that Sir Robert succeeded to an entailed estate of five thousand per annum, and Barty to exactly the amount of his yearly income.

There were three children of them. They had a sister, who, being brought up in

Suffolk by a maiden aunt, remained an invisible girl to her brothers. But as little Harriet's portion was no larger than Barty's, she probably shared his opinion, that Justinian Broadham, Esq., M.P., of Lombard Street and East Wandsworth, belonged to the *rugosus* or *spinosissimus* species of the genus Guardian.

The parents of these children had died before the elder of the three was four years old, within a few months of each other; some said, of a pulmonary complaint,—others, of the overjoy of succeeding to the fine property of Wrenhurst Park, by the sudden death of a bachelor uncle, in the prime of life and matrimonial intentions.

But the untimely death of Barty's father soon after his accession of fortune, had rendered it impossible to increase the portions of his younger children, consisting of five thousand pounds apiece—the third of the splendid fortune on which a young man pos-

essed of ten, and a girl possessed of five, had been rash enough to marry, and become founders of a family.

The grandfather of my friend Barty, an opulent Yorkshire grazier, had worked his way upwards in the world, and converted his hundreds into hundreds of thousands, and his paddocks into a park; while his uncle, the second of the dynasty, had converted certain of his thousands into a baronetcy, at that epoch of the reign of George III., when half the worthies of the parish of Marylebone used to go to bed John Thompson, and rise Sir John. The little Sir Robert Brookes, of Wrenhurst Park, who was conveyed to Eton in the handsome post-chariot of his guardian, was consequently entitled to the utmost protection of Dr. Keate, as a Bart. of three descents, in the enjoyment of a fine landed property; and people were as little likely to trouble themselves about his origin, as to inquire whether he had a younger brother.

A year afterwards, Barty himself was forwarded, by the Clewer coach, to the same destination. Had any human being besides his old nurse felt interested in his destinies, the proposition would probably have been mooted, whether the school that was good for a lad with five thousand per annum, was not *too* good for a lad with scarcely the half of five hundred. But no questions were asked. Old Broadham satisfied his conscience with muttering something about "the advantages of connection to a youth who has his way to push in the world;" a specious interpretation of the fact that it was less trouble to have the boys at the same school; and that the same "fetching for the holidays" served for both.

He had never exactly understood why his friendship with Sir Robert the first, whose Yorkshire connection was the means of establishing his constituency in Lombard Street, should have put it into the head of Barty's

father to burden him with the guardianship of his young family ; for though in ancient Rome the birth of three children intitled a man, by virtue of the *jus trium liberorum*, to certain enfranchisements, the banker did not see why, in modern Wandsworth, the privilege was to be renewed. And if he accepted a trust, of which every possible cost was to be defrayed out of the estate, it was chiefly lest the large Yorkshire and Lincolnshire constituency, for which he was indebted to the Brookeses, should take his refusal amiss.

Both were good-looking lads. But Barty, who had roughed his way through the hard fare and hard work of a Yorkshire school, while Sir Robert was kept in silken leading-strings at an Academy near town, had already learned that a man must square his elbows who has to push his way through the crowd ; while his elder understood the wisdom of standing still, that his way might be pushed

for him. With his schoolfellows, the active brother was of course the more popular. But Sir Robert had still the best of it at Wands-worth.

Among the many arguments by which old Broadham justified to himself the education he was giving to a lad so slenderly provided for as Barty, was that Sir Robert, on attaining his majority, would doubtless execute for his younger brother the vague duty of rich relationship—"doing something." The young Baronet, on succeeding to an unencumbered estate, enriched by the savings of his minority, must "do something" for Barty. Even to himself, the banker did not particularize what the "something" was to be: whether another five thousand tacked to his patrimony,—or the purchase-money of a living, or commission. But, among three children so unequally portioned, the elder has to play the part of a father towards the other two.

Old Broadham probably conceived that

Barty himself entertained similar expectations ;—so contented or rather so joyous was the temper with which he confronted the troubles of life.—Barty Brookes was imperturbable,—Barty Brookes was insubmergeable.—He had not been six months at Eton, before he was one of the most popular fellows in the school.

Like other younger sons who have only their skins to be careful of, *his* was risked without a thought. Were I to recount the personal feats of my friend Barty, the credulous age we live in, which swallows the wild-fire anecdotes of an American newspaper, would laugh me to scorn. The staid banker, into whose ears stories of his reckless bravery were poured in all directions, began to shake his head, and doubt whether any good would come of his ward. Even his chums admitted him to be a perfect dare-devil. “The thing is,” said Barty, when challenged concerning his exploits, “I’m obliged to break bounds,

ride, shoot, climb, swim and row, for *two*!— Bob is such a deuce of a spoony and takes such confounded care of himself, that, for the honour of the family, I am forced to run constant risk of expulsion.”

No one but his brother ever dreamed of abbreviating Sir Robert into “Bob.” His toes were as square as if he had been born as well as bred in Lombard Street.— He was an exemplary young gentleman, — the pride of Keate, and idol of his dame ; who took back to Wandsworth, at the close of his half, two thirds of the pocket-money he had brought with him to Eton.

The translation of the proprietor of Wrenhurst from Eton to Oxford, was the moment that brought the relative position of the two boys to a crisis. Old Broadham, judging that, at sixteen and seventeen, they were old enough to listen to his first speech from the throne, apprized them that their roads must henceforward lie apart ; since “ Bar-

tholomew,"—(*he* did not abate a single syllable of the four,)—was not sufficiently well off to enjoy the advantages of a university education.

But, if he had calculated on the probability that the "something" to be done by the young baronet would now demonstrate itself in the shape of a request that Barty might accompany him to Christ church *quand même*, and at his cost,—he was thoroughly mistaken.—Sir Robert was delighted to get rid of the only one of his young companions who took the liberty of calling him Bob; and as to Barty, after throwing up his hat for joy at the notion of his education being over three years before that of his brother, and listening with an air of wonder to the old banker's impudent promise to exert his interest to obtain him a clerkship in some substantial house of business, he announced his intention of entering the Guards.

"The *Guards*?—the Guards, with an in-

come of two hundred and ten pounds a year? Where would the money come from, for the purchase of his commission?—and to what did the imprudent young man expect to work his way?”—

“Let the future take care of itself!”—cried the foolish boy in reply.—“As to the commission, my godfather, Sir Willoughby Marsden, has already obtained the promise of one from the Horse Guards.”

This intimation of a secret understanding and correspondence between Barty and his godfather,—(an old general officer high in favour with the royal family and high in fashion at the Cocoa Tree,) completed the antipathy of the city man towards his thoughtless ward. Hitherto, he had despised him as a wretched younger son. He now began to abhor him as a wretched younger son who had found friends. Even Sir Robert, on discovering that Barty had a protector, regarded him as less his brother.

“The time will come, young gentleman,” said the banker, “when you will understand the advantage it would have been to you to enter life as the protégé of a man of capital rather than of a man of fashion. In the city, *my* recommendation would have gone for something. But, since you prefer tinsel to gold, so be it. A red coat has its charm, I presume, even though likely to be threadbare. But one thing, Mr. Brookes, I beg you to understand; that, incur what debts or difficulties you may, not a shilling beyond the two hundred and ten pounds thirteen shillings and eightpence per annum to which you are legitimately intitled will you receive at my hands, till the attainment of your majority. Your brother may hereafter do something for you, if he thinks proper. But, till he is of age, his allowance of six hundred per annum—”

He paused—having suddenly discovered that Sir Robert was his only auditor! At

the height of his discourse, Barty had profited by the open window near which he was standing, to drop down upon the velvet lawn of old Broadham's villa; and leave the lecture for the enjoyment of the elder brother, who monopolized so many of the good things of the family.

CHAPTER II.

Every guise of fortune
Is smoothed by that below. The learned pate
Ducks to the golden fool. All is oblique.
There's nothing level in our cursed natures
But direct villany.

SHAKSPEARE.

It was not alone to get rid of his prosy guardian, that Barty had bolted. He had caught sight at the extremity of the shrubbery of Emmy's white gown,—or rather white frock, for she was little more than a child.

Child as she was, however, Emmy was the only thing that made the Broadhams' formal establishment supportable to Barty; the old banker being as stiff as the clay of Wrenhurst, or, as a German court. His grandfather was a quaker, his father a wet quaker; and though

Justinian had taken refuge in the bosom of the Mother Church, it was only that she might roll him on castors into parliament. To his constituents, Broadham was a high churchman. He was still a quaker at heart.

In his Wandsworth home, all was tame, and colourless—the clockwork routine life without passions or predilections. A hearty laugh had never been heard in the house. A great joy was it to Barty when he could get a rise out of his guardian by a display of china or furniture, or an inbreak into the patent steam grapery he loved.

“Think how obliged the old soul would be to me,” said he, in describing the extreme measures to which he was obliged to have recourse, “for quickening the circulation of his blood !”

But from the moment Emmy made her appearance in the house, Barty had merited the arm-chairs and dessert plates. One day in a sudden fit of enthusiasm or qualms

conscience, Mrs. Broadham was pleased to adopt one of the twelve fatherless children of a poor relation. But though her only son was married and settled, no sooner had poor Emmy become her inmate, than she repented her false start of generosity; and, but that she contrived to make the girl useful in winding worsted, writing notes, and supporting the ill-humours of a rainy day, would perhaps have found some pretext for wrangling out of her bargain.

For the present, however, Emmy retained possession of her unenviable post, and Barty's last two holidays from Eton were cheered by the companionship of a fellow-sufferer under Broadham persecution. Together, they were talked at, together threatened by the old folks. Denied the society of his sister, Barty rejoiced at having found a friend; and the first flood of tears ever seen to proceed from the blue eyes of Emmy was on learning that her playmate was about to enter the army.

“ You will never set foot in this dreary house again, when once you are in the Guards,” said she. “ Who *would*, that could help it!—I shall have no one now to keep me company but your brother; and I would as soon walk in the shrubberies with Mr. Broadham himself, as Sir Robert!”

“ Don’t be afraid, darling Emmy!” cried her young Romeo. “ So long as you remain with the Broadhams, I will never desert the house. Much as I detest it and all its ways, I shall often ride down to Wandsworth, to see what you are about.”

But Emmy’s tears flowed only more freely at the thoughts that he who was to ride down, must also ride back again, and leave her more cheerless than before! For nearly a day after Barty took his last leave of his guardian’s establishment, to join the battalion of Guards into which he had been gazetted some weeks before, the poor girl was inconsolable. While the crabbed banker and his cold moiety

drew a deep breath of relief, at having got rid of him, the sighs of the poor relation were as warm as the patent steam grapehouse of old Broadham.

On joining his regiment, meanwhile, Barty was not long in discovering that the patronage of his red-nosed old godfather was to be limited to the commission he had obtained for him. But Sir Willoughby, who was a thorough man of the world, if he gave him nothing else, was no niggard of his advice.

“ You have got into the Guards in haste, Mr. Brookes,” said he, “ and will mayhap repent at leisure. Better have stuck to the city. Better have stuck to the banking connection in which you have been brought up. Nothing to be done in the army, as times go! No getting on without interest—no getting on without money; and you have neither one nor t’other! Even those who are backed, like myself, by family influence, find them-

selves laid on the shelf at last, with a pension incomparably less than the wages of a French cook. If I had life to begin again, I would almost as soon be a scavenger as a soldier! The army is the only profession that precludes all hope of the acquirement of a fortune such as intitles a man to look his fellow-creatures in the face."

And though Barty laughed in his sleeve at this pithy oration, the facts of the case forced themselves on his recognition much sooner than he could have desired. Sir Willoughby was right. He was *not* rich enough for the Guards. He saw his brother officers in the enjoyment of a thousand pleasures which to *him* were forbidden fruit. Where was the use of London, if all its enjoyments were out of reach?

It was perhaps the habit of revolving this wisdom in his mind, that left him no leisure for the accomplishment of his promises to his old playmate. Had Wandsworth been in

Yorkshire, he could hardly have found it more difficult to reach. Or was it that the preaching of Sir Willoughby had enlightened his mind to the danger of so intimate a friendship with one still more penniless than himself?—

One dreary Sunday evening, however, towards the end of August, when the better half of his brother-officers were off to the moors, the opera being closed, and the very sun like an old plated candlestick beginning to show copper in place of its customary brightness, the parched dreariness of the empty park recalled to mind the grassy freshness of old Broadham's velvet lawn—that fine soft turf produced by a century of mowing; and lo! his desponding mood gave way in a moment at the thought of Wandsworth and its Hamadryad—that darling Emmy, with whom he had so often traversed that short green herbage—race-running in the early spring,—or in the dusk of a summer's

evening,—their arms interlaced,—their hearts nearly as closely entwined.

His heart was full, when he thought of all this;—all the fuller, perhaps, because his pockets were empty;—a combination singularly favourable to the development of pathetic sentiment.

“ I will ride down to Wandsworth, damme if I don’t ! ” murmured he, at the close of his reverie ; adding, in a lower voice, as if in palliation of his rashness, “ for there is not a soul left in town, and I may as well keep up my connection with the Broadhams.”

As he approached the villa, Barty prepared his courage for reproaches. The old people were probably indignant at his neglect. The young one—alas ! what could he possibly say in excuse for himself to Emmy !

No occasion for a single word ! — Mrs. Broadham received him with her usual placid indifference, — apparently unconscious that more than a day had elapsed since they

parted; and as to Emmy, she was grown nearly as frigid and reserved as the rest of the family. The romping girl was already transmuted into a grave young woman. While surveying her inexpressive face and perpendicular person, Barty could scarcely bring himself to believe that, but a few weeks before, they had run races together in the twilight.

So far from grieving after his absence, she evidently regretted that he had not continued to stay away; and no sooner had the indignant Barty made the discovery, than he hastened to accept the invitation of the Broadhams to dine, and ride back to town in the cool of the evening. Since she wanted him gone, he would remain.

It was the custom of the enfranchised man of business to devote his sabbath leisure to carnal pleasures. As sure as Sunday came, half the Stock Exchange was seated round his dinner-table:—city chums, pious worshippers like himself of the molten calf, and, like

himself, as expert as Birch or Grove in deciding on the richness of the turbot, or ripeness of the haunch.

Well did Barty remember how he used to watch with loathing the greedy tremulousness of lip with which these sensualists gloated over their repast ! But he now noted it with fifty-fold greater abhorrence. Not alone, because, in the interim, he had sat at good men's feasts, and perceived how much the intellectual predominated over the physical, in the pleasant chat and sparkling wit of the best dinner tables of London ; but because convinced that, among those ponderous mortals whose capacities were absorbed in the pursuit of gain, lay the charm which had operated so strange a revolution in the nature of Emmy.

They were chiefly single men. For it is only bachelor guests who are at the disposal of Sunday dinners ; and, disgusting as he had found aforetime the obesity of the prize-ox

Russia merchant from Great St. Helen's—the squinting stockbroker from Birchin Lane, attired in the resplendent fashions of Moses and Co.—and the spare banker from the Poultry, whose face was puckered into the thousand wrinkles of a collapsed India-rubber ball, (each of whom, like the prudent Mr. Thomas Inkle, would have sold his Yarico into slavery,) never had he found them, severally and collectively, so repellent as with the conviction that the Broadhams had influenced their poor dependant to select among these men of millions a home more permanent than she derived from their grudging benevolence. The same philosophy expounded to himself by Sir Willoughby Marsden had probably made a convert of Emmy.

His approval or disapproval was a matter of complete indifference to the whole party. In their opinion, antipathies or predilections were luxuries as much beyond the reach of so small a capitalist, as turtle and venison; and,

like them, only to be enjoyed at the cost of other people.

When, therefore, the young guardsman endeavoured to speak daggers to the cits by a pungent allusion to the money-changers in the Temple, they treated his impertinence with the disregard they would have shown to the buzzing of a gnat; and pursued among themselves the discussion of their bargains of the preceding week.

Justinian Broadham was their main link with the legislature of the country; and, as it happened that the Sunday in question was the one immediately following the prorogation of parliament, a variety of explanations and projects were discussed between them, of such vital importance to the interests of national commerce, that even the self-complacent Barty was forced to feel that an ensign of his majesty's foot-guards is but a Lilliputian fraction of the empire of Great Britain.

The sense of his insignificance did not, however, put him in better conceit with these tame elephants—these moneyed men—most of them as yellow as if the gold they loved were flowing molten in their veins. But he ceased to wonder that contact with such a weight of metal had deadened the spirits of his pretty little Emmy. A few more such Sundays, and he should himself be qualified to represent a metropolitan district.

The prospect, perhaps, was not displeasing, —or curiosity had the best of it—or his heart still remained full, and his pockets empty; for he found nothing better to do than return Sunday after Sunday, to the villa. Amazing the quantity of venison and turtle, bulls and bears, scrip and omnium, which he contrived to swallow. And still, without attaining a surmise *which* of the eight or ten humpish, hazy old fellows who constituted the Broadham coterie, had proved the means of con-

verting the wilful, wayward Emmy into a Mrs. Margery Meanwell!

He dwelt indeed so curiously upon the question, that he was as near as possible striking the balance between a pair of arch blue eyes and his future prospects in life. But, luckily for my friend Barty, just as he was on the point of renouncing the charms of pounds, shillings, and pence for himself and his heirs for ever, London began to fill again. —The theatres opened—the gas-lights blazed—the clubs became slightly sprinkled—and, after the first Thames flood, the Wandsworth Road was again voted impassable. A flirtation is a pleasant thing, but not when it leads a man into a quagmire; and, as old Broadham, like Childe Waters in the ballad,

Was never so courteous a knight

As to say, my Barty, will you ride?—

he remained high and dry in St. James's, leaving the miry ways of Wandsworth,

and unaccountable ways of Emmy, to take care of themselves.

Once lost sight of, and by degrees dismissed from his thoughts, he was all the happier. It was about that time, commenced my intimacy with Barty. We were in the same regiment. I was just then making a two years' income of my patrimony, for the creation of a momentary flash of fashion; and of those by whose applause and example I was stimulated, Barty Brookes was by far the most attractive.

By example, I do not mean as regards prodigality; for he was not yet of age, and was much too well acquainted with the obstinacy of the ex-Quaker (which Broadham called steadiness to his word,) to hazard the annoyances certain to arise from exceeding his income. The stiff old general, Sir Willoughby, moreover, in presenting him with his commission, had insisted too strongly on the ungentlemanliness of incurring liabilities beyond

his means, that after the first six months he managed his small income with the financial wisdom of a Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Still, as the son and brother of a wealthy baronet, he passed for a young man of good fortune and good prospects. No one but myself in the regiment was aware of the real state of the case ; and, as every body is ready to give to those who want nothing, Barty, being so capital a horseman that every one was glad to mount him, became the crack rider with the buckhounds, and, by winning several steeple-chases, had more than once doubled the value of a horse ; while, during the summer months, his high courage and nautical skill and, above all, his companionableness and good humour insured him six times as much yachting as was compatible with his regimental duties.

Scarcely a fellow in his battalion who had shooting at his disposal, but shared it with Barty ; and, on occasions of Richmond and

Greenwich parties, the best place on the best drag was sure to be reserved for him. His jokes were successful,—his songs encored. Never was there so capital a fellow as Barty Brookes !

From eighteen to twenty, what can a man want more than such a life? From eighteen to twenty, what man, leading such a life, is likely to look forward? Providence for the future, under such circumstances, would be like tucking an umbrella under one's arm, for a walk in the dog days.

Even when the time approached for the attainment of his brother's majority, (the term previous to which Sir Robert was to quit Oxford after taking his degree,) Barty troubled himself no further concerning the critical moment which was to enable his brother to "do" the "something" so often and so vaguely alluded to, than by congratulating himself that the lease for which the Wrenhurst property had been let, would then

expire; and that, for the future, he should have excellent shooting of his own, (was not his brother's his own?) to offer to his friends, in return for all he had been enjoying. Sir Robert was a grave, silent young man, a bit of a prig, and a bit of a spoony, who would leave all that sort of thing in his hands.

Already, by anticipation, he felt how pleasant it would be to have a country house to which he could take down a friend, for a few days' sport; and I was probably not the only fellow of his set to whom he had already tendered the hospitalities of the house of his fathers. I hope I was the only one rash enough to provide himself in consequence with leather gaiters and a shooting-jacket!

One day—a hot summer's day it was,—one of those stirring London-season days, when the necessity of keeping open one's windows exposes one, in addition to the thunder of the carriages, to ear-piercing cries of “fresh-gathered strawberries” and “green hastings,”

I was lying extended on the brown Holland sofa of my lodgings, vainly attempting to doze over the novel of O'Donnell, then in the first brilliancy of its favour, when, lo! in burst Barty, begging me to take his guard for him on the following day.

It was not weather to be obliging, and I was brute enough to stand out.

"I wouldn't ask you again *so soon*, my dear fellow," cried he,—(and let the word explain how often my good will towards him was imposed upon,)—"but I *must* have to-morrow to myself!"

"And so must I," was my languid answer,—"for I shall be up till morning at the Argyle Rooms."

"Just for this once!—I will take two for you in return!"

"Some coaching expedition to the Black Dog!"

"In that case, you would be of the party!"

“ A Greenwich dinner then, with Chéri! Considering how the last ended, depend upon it I will not aid and abet you in such another scrape.”

“ You are quite out, my dear fellow !” persisted Barty.—“ This is another affair. —I have got a formal invitation for dinner to-morrow at my guardian’s ; and as my brother is to be in town to-night, I conclude it is for a sort of family meeting ; for it is more than a twelvemonth since old Broadham condescended to ask me into his house.”

“ Why could you not tell me all this at first ?” said I,—exchanging my horizontal for the perpendicular, and entering more eagerly into his prospects than could have been expected in such weather, from even the best of friends. “ Business before pleasure !—Of course I will take your guard.”

Before I was relieved from it, I had a visit from Barty in person, on his way home from Wandsworth to his lodgings.

When he first entered the room, where both the atmosphere and my sight were somewhat troubled by the meerschaum I had been smoking, I fancied for a single second that old Broadham's Port, Madeira, and lime-punch, had been too much for brains accustomed to claret and champagne. A singular look about the eyes seemed to announce that Barty was *cut*.

And so he was,—to the soul!—He was literally reeling under the shock he had received.

The family-meeting had been called preparatory to Sir Robert's attainment of years of discretion, to announce to Barty not what he intended to "do for him,"—but what he was going to do for himself. His wedding day was to follow that of his coming of age!

"Going to be married?" cried I, who, in common with the rest of Barty's friends, had indulged in absurd dreams of his future in-

heritance of Wrenhurst.—“Too young by half,—too young—too young!”

“Too old by half, for such a piece of tomfoolery as he is about to be guilty of!” rejoined my friend.

Apprehending by the exasperation of his manner that Sir Robert had been deluded into one of those wretched connections sometimes provoked at Oxford by the rawness of an undergraduate, I had not courage to question him further.

“When I arrived to-day at Hypocrisy Hall,” said he—(it was thus he always designated his guardian’s villa)—“I was convinced from the horribly demure faces of the whole party, that some monstrous treachery was brewing. I vow to Heaven, my dear Percy, that a nabab arriving by the last India fleet on the look-out for investments for his money, could not have been more warmly welcomed. Old Lombard-Street in-

quired twice before we sat down to dinner whether I minded a draught; and helped me to an Alderman's share of the fin of the turbot and fat of the haunch!—The Judas!"

And poor Barty was literally forced to pause and wipe away the moisture of agitation from his forehead.

"After dinner," continued he, with a gasp,—"the moment his Simon-Pure-looking butler had quitted the room, the old sinner, looking round the table with a smirk of complacency I shall never forget, proposed a toast—the health of Sir Robert and Lady Brookes!"—

"Married already?"—

"You look almost as much amazed as I did!—No!—It was merely a delicate pleasantry of the kind that prevails at Wandsworth. But the future bride and bridegroom looked quite as overwhelmed as though the funeral service had already been read over them, and the drop fallen!"

“The bride?—you did not tell me the bride had been asked to meet you.—And who then, after all, is to be the future Lady Bountiful of Wrenhurst Park?”

“*Who?*—Cannot you guess, my dear fellow,—cannot you guess?—That confounded little jilt—Emmy!”—

CHAPTER III.

Art sick ?—art sad ?—art angry with the world ?—
Do all friends fail thee ?—Why, then give thyself
Unto the forests and ambrosial fields :
Commerce with them and with the eternal sky.
Never despair !

PROCTOR.

It needed no great stress of argument on my part to convince poor Barty, that if he betrayed to the wedding-party the following day only half the emotion he was now exhibiting, his depression would be attributed to the most degrading motives. His brother knew nothing, and his guardian pretended to know nothing, of any previous romplings between him and the bride. The match had been long arranged. Mrs. Broadham's prudent suggestions to her dependent kinswoman touching her future establishment were fur-

ther sighted than Barty had at first supposed ; and, at the very time my friend was so jealous of the fat Russian merchant and lean stock-broker, Emmy was his affianced sister-in-law.

It could scarcely be otherwise. The young Baronet's vacations were spent under his guardian's roof ; nor had he ever opened his lips to any other young lady than the blue-eyed and slender-waisted but exceedingly demure damsel, whose price, he was assured, was beyond rubies.

However enraged, therefore, at finding himself thus cleverly jockeyed, Barty retained sufficient self-command to go through the part of bridesman with grace and spirit ; and, as his young sister and her maiden aunt had been invited out of Suffolk to be present at the ceremony, he experienced some compensation in his introduction to Harriet, whom he saw almost for the first time, for the annoyances arising from the match.

I must say a word or two of Harriet, though

I trust the attention of the reader is absorbed now by the vexations of Barty; for Miss Brookes was a girl of so gentle and retiring a nature, that none but her intimates were qualified to speak of her as she deserved. Though but a year younger than Barty, (and myself) compared with us, she was a child. Her existence had been of so secluded a nature, that she had scarcely voice to answer the commonest question, and trembled when looked at. A hard fate! for those who caught a single glimpse of her sweet face found it a difficult matter to look at anything else.

Barty was enchanted with her. Judging of his family by his reserved brother, it had never occurred to him that a sister could be anything so delightful. And though by the marriage of that day he lost his chance of the baronetcy and five thousand a year, he rose next morning feeling himself richer than he had ever felt in his life. It is true that I, who had been invited to the wedding-

breakfast to keep him in countenance, had never ceased congratulating him since the event, not upon having such a sister-in-law, but such a sister.

“And did old Broadham say nothing to you, in the course of the day,” I inquired,—(having noticed sundry whisperings pass between the wily guardian and his ward) “concerning what Sir Robert is to do for you?”

“Not a syllable.”

“The announcement is probably deferred, then, till you come of age next year? Your brother, doubtless, means to provide for you—the estate being entailed—out of his savings!”

“Hardly,” replied Barty, with a scornful smile. “For the private conversation you noticed between me and the old gentleman purported to intimate that, in order not to encumber with a dower the landed property of his ward, the accumu-

lations of the minority were settled on Lady Brookes and her children."

"And you did not break out, even *then*?"

"To what purpose? The deed of settlement was signed, sealed, and delivered before I even heard of the match! And a pretty match old Lombard-Street has proved for me. Hang him!—In these days, it is so seldom that a squaretoes like that obtains the advantage over one of *us*!"

"After all his unmeaning protestations, then, you conceive that Sir Robert has put it out of his power to make any addition to yours and Miss Brookes's fortunes?"

"Harriet wants nothing of him. A pretty girl marries as easily with five thousand pounds, as ten. But I *do* mean that every guinea of his money is disposed of. Henceforward, I know what I have got to trust to,—and little enough it is."

From that day, Barty, who had been hitherto so thoughtless of fortune and care-

less of his future prospects, became suddenly inoculated with interestedness. He began to value money as a man who, in a trance, hears the nails knocking into his coffin, may be supposed to value life. Contented as he had always been, now that his destinies were immutable, he found them insufficient for his happiness. The fortune to achieve which had sufficed to deteriorate the character of the candid Emmy, deteriorated also by its loss the character of poor Barty.

As to Sir Robert's "doing something" for him, when he came of age, he now knew better than to expect it. And experience confirmed his wisdom. The brothers never met, but the proprietor of Wrenhurst took occasion to bewail his poverty.

"It was such a trying thing—such a *very* trying thing,—to live in a neighbourhood inhabited by families of thrice your income. Their neighbours at Wrenhurst were the Duke of Allonby, who was spending sixty

thousand per annum; Lord Spalding, with five-and-thirty; and Sir Archibald Honer and Sir Thomas Walmisley, twenty thousand a year apiece!—To live amongst such men on terms of gentlemanly equality, was a difficult matter for a man with a miserable five! He did not know how he should get on. It would be a hard matter to make both ends meet. Though Emmy's experience in so prudent a household as that of the Broadhams had naturally made her an excellent manager, he greatly feared that by the end of the year they should find Wrenhurst too great a pull upon their income."

Poor Barty began almost to doubt whether it was not rather his duty to assign one of his two hundreds a year to his brother, towards keeping up the family place, rather than claim anything at his hands; nor would he have accepted succour of the overtasked baronet, even had it been offered.

The worst of it was that Barty's sudden

perception, not only of the value of money but of his own straitened prospects, began to operate on his temper, and render him a less agreeable companion. By the time a little heir was born to Wrenhurst, so thoroughly had his fine flow of spirits run dry, that people grew less fond of having him at their dinners in London, and Christmas parties in the country. His face had lost its cherubic proportions, and become as long as a visitation sermon. His joyous voice was acquiring a peevish inflexion. The tenor of his days had ceased to be *couleur de rose*. The inward canker of money-love was beginning its ravages!—

Though he had never experienced the smallest temptation to run in debt, now that his credit was reduced to such diminutive proportions, he made it a grievance that, had he wished it ever so much, he could not have commanded the loan of a thousand pounds.

This fractionousness was the more unlucky

because, no sooner is it discovered in a regiment that a man possesses a *raw*, than it is played upon without mercy. His brother officers had no patience with Barty,—their own generous, rough-and-ready Barty,—for looking with such envious eyes on the happiness and good fortune of his brother.

There was a Lord James (no matter what) in our company—not a bad fellow in essentials—but so overflowing with spirits, from an accumulation of the prosperities of existence, that his liveliness was sometimes scarcely to be borne by fellows smarting under the rubs of life. With good health, good looks, good fortune, and good blood to create sunshine around him, he was a bad companion for a rainy day; for, so far from seeking to communicate his contentedness to others, his happy fortunes surrounded him with a mephitic atmosphere of egotism, like the malaria engendered by a luxuriant jungle.

“I shall come and ask you for a day’s

sport at Wrenhurst, on my way back from the Moors, Barty, my boy," said he, a month or two after the wedding; "I suppose you spend the shooting season in the North?"

"Most likely in town," was the morose reply.

"In town?—Stuff and nonsense!—September and October in the Tower, counting the sparrows perched on the weathercocks, when you have the best pheasant-shooting in England at your command."

"At my *brother's* command."

"What is *his* is yours—except his wife. By Jove, if *my* Cain were to make any demur about giving me shooting, for myself and friends, I should make no scruple about winging him!"—

"The Duke of Gateshead and your lordship live on other terms than I and my brother," said Barty, stiffly. "You have something to give in return."

"And so have *you*, if you'd the spirit to

give it!—a good lesson—*à deux sous le cachet*. Only write Sir Robert word that, since he does not choose to allow you a fair share of the family preserves...”

“Who said he did not *choose*?”—interrupted Barty, peevishly. “Wait till I complain, before you redress my injuries. It does not follow that, because I am unable to offer pheasant shooting to the brother of a duke who has manors in every county in England, I am on bad terms with Sir Robert Brookes!”—

“Still, a brother whose minority must have been heaping up stacks of gold, might surely contrive to...”

“When I want advice about my family affairs, my dear Lord James, I go to my family lawyer!”—was the bitter retort of Barty, who hated to have his private history dragged out for the amusement of the mess. “When I consult you, I give you leave to favour me with your counsels.”

It was only to *me* he spoke more freely. *I* was not so enscaled within the golden armour of prosperity, as to render me insensible to the troubles of my friends. *I* could sympathize in his disappointments !

It was not, however, about money that he complained. The “something” of which he felt himself robbed, was not the other half of his fortune.

“It is hard,” said he, “that a man like Robert,” (he had ceased to call him Bob) “possessed of all the endowments of this life, could not leave so small a thing to his poor wretch of a younger brother, as his guardian’s poor relation !—He was welcome to all the rest. He had no business to meddle with Emmy !”

All the love which united the two brothers in their nursing pinafore and nankin frocks—all the sympathy that made them sit hand-in-hand during the pantomime in the Christmas holidays, that they might support each other’s

courage at the explosion of the squibs, had already subsided into mere acquaintanceship, demonstrated on Sir Robert's part by an annual letter, to announce the sprouting of an olive branch ;—on that of Barty, by nothing.—He did not wait till offence was given him. He chose to *take* it !—

As I said before, I alone was in his confidence. But besides what he chose to confide, the chafings of his spirit showed themselves in a thousand nameless trifles.

One Christmas, a couple of years after the marriage, I happened to be going down to stay with Lord and Lady Mandevale, who had made a party for the Bury ball (one of the best provincial meetings in England) ; and on the eve of my departure, knowing that his maiden aunt resided in the neighbourhood, I asked Barty for a letter of introduction.

I know not whether his mind misgave him that I had canvassed for the invitation that was carrying me into Suffolk, expressly in

the hope of renewing my acquaintance with Harriet, but he refused my request point blank. Had I been as apt as himself to take offence, there would have been an end of all friendship between us.

“Not the least chance of your meeting with my good aunt at the Bury ball!” said he, perceiving that his ungraciousness had offended me. “The worthy woman is too grave for such scenes—and too poor!”

“But I may, perhaps, meet Miss Brookes under the chaperonage of some other person?”

“In that case, the acquaintance you made with her at Hypocrisy Hall forestals the necessity for an introduction.”

“I could almost fancy, Barty,” said I, pettishly, “that you disapproved my acquaintance with your family!”

“And so I do!” was his gruff but honest answer. “Half the miseries in this world arise from acquaintanceships, rashly made, and entailing fatal results.”

“ And you fancy that a visit from *me* might entail fatal results on Oak Hill?” said I, with a forced smile.

“ How came you to know the name of their residence?” interrupted he, with an air of growing suspicion.

“ Considering the number of times I have seen letters addressed thither in your handwriting...”

“ I have not written to either my aunt or sister these twelve months.”

“ Do not quarrel with me, because my memory is better than your own,” cried I. “ Surely there is no crime in feeling an interest in the sister of my friend?”

“ No crime, but prodigious folly!” retorted he. “ I tell you, again, my dear Percy, my sister is *poor*—as poor as *I* am—miserably poor!”—

“ The greater the equality between us!” was my rash rejoinder.

“ Curse the equality! Harriet must marry

a rich man. Together, you would be wretched !
—together, you would be contemptible !”

“ I only ask an introduction to a partner
at a ball—not to a partner for life.”

“ Ball-partnerships are the foundation of
a thousand miserable matches.”

“ In one word, my dear Barty, you are
awfully afraid of having me for a brother-in-
law.”

“ Thanks to my having Sir Robert Brookes
for a brother,—thanks to the cursed influence
of Hypocrisy Hall !—I have learned, to my
cost, the misery of poverty. I know what it
is, now, to be stinted at every turn, and
ashamed to look one’s valet in the face, be-
cause he is better dressed than oneself. Were
I master of Wrenhurst, indeed, I would say
make yourself acceptable to Harriet, if you
can ; and, if secure of her affections, nothing
shall be wanting that brotherly regard can
afford you. But I can do nothing. I am
myself little better than a pauper. I must

go struggling and striving on, to the end of my days ; never drawing a free breath like a gentleman, or able to afford the comforts of life."

"Your brother cannot but advance the means of pushing you in your profession," I suggested, foreseeing one of his moods of crabbed despondency.

"My profession, my profession!"—was his peevish rejoinder. "These are not times when the army can be called a profession. A poor captain in the Guards is as wretched a thing as a poor anything else. No, my dear Percy ! mouth as we may about disinterestedness, and greatness of soul, and all that sort of rubbish, depend upon it money is the only thing that renders life palatable. A man of capital is the only man who is his own master, and the master of other people."

"I fear you are right!" said I, with a heavy sigh ; "and, alas ! the sore disease called poverty is hereditary in *my* family, as in some others the gout."

"Take my advice, therefore, my dear fellow!" cried he. "Go and dance at the Bury ball, without troubling your head about my sister. You will find plenty of charming partners besides Miss Brookes."

I took his advice, already aware that in ball-rooms neither Harriet nor her aunt were likely to be found. But the way in which he chose to prejudge the affair rendered it impossible for me to confide to him a fact, of which he remained in ignorance, almost unbrotherly; *i. e.* that Oak Hill was situated on the borders of Lord Mandevale's park, and that I was about to spend the Christmas holidays within a bow-shot of the garden of Eden.

If I did not inform him of this previous to my departure, I was not likely to be more candid on my return; for it might have put an end to all friendship and good-will between us, to know that, without fear of his displeasure before my eyes, I had passed

more than half the time of my absence in company with that dear Harriet to whom he seemed bent on keeping me a stranger !

Mandevale Park seemed perfectly aware that one of its highest titles to consideration arose from its contiguity to the humble little domain of Oak Hill. Not alone were Mrs. Brookes and her niece included in all its *fêtes*, but the Mandevales appeared to think it the most natural thing in the world that, every morning after breakfast, instead of joining the shooting party or repairing to the billiard-room with the rest of the young men, I should be seen scudding along the park,—under an umbrella too, for the weather was most unpropitious,—in the direction of the old house, said to be the original residence of the Mandevale family, before a rich marriage enabled them to erect their present handsome mansion.

In calling the weather unpropitious, however, I talk like a fool ; for it was perfection

for a wooer. Thanks to Macintosh and Caoutchouc, a man may present himself, in the worst of weather, as dry as a bag of Carolina rice, in defiance of rain, hail, or sleet. Whereas by concealing his clogs and umbrella in a dark corner of the hall, he is intitled to look out despondingly at the clouds, at what ought to be the close of his visit; so that not even the most hard-hearted of parents or guardians but must insist on his remaining "till it clears up."

It scarcely "cleared up" during the ten days of my visit to the Mandevales! I conclude so, at least, for I scarcely ever left Oak Hill. Every evening, the aunt and niece joined our sociable party at the Hall; and the consequence was, that, just as Barty had predicted, the night of the Bury ball was the only one we did not spend together.

Mrs. Brookes's decided objection to large assemblies was not to be shaken by the entreaties of the Mandevale party, that her

amiable charge might, for once in her life, enjoy the pleasures of a ball-room. For, alas! it was by enjoying them "once in *her* life," that her own days had been embittered. That little, frail, delicate-looking maiden aunt, whose complexion resembled one of Benvenuto Cellini's carvings in ivory, while the short hair, parted over her smooth forehead, was white as silver, had fallen into premature decrepitude, thanks to a single flirtation at a county ball.

The attachment!—of which it laid the foundation—had never known a day of sunshine. The Brookes family had been *created* by the system of sacrificing the younger children to the aggrandizement of the elder son. For a time, indeed, the young couple had looked forward for the means of settling, to the bounties of the bachelor brother from whom Barty's father inherited his fortune; and when his sudden death was followed by the untimely decease of his successor, and a long

minority, all hope of an addition to their scanty fortunes vanished; whereupon the poor soldier went with his regiment—a condemned regiment—to die in the West Indies; bequeathing on his death-bed to his plighted love the small patrimony they had trusted to enjoy together.

It was this provision, small as it was, that enabled her to afford a home to her brother's orphan. But the domestic calamity in which it had its rise inspired her with an insurmountable abhorrence of public entertainments.

But they were the only things in the world she hated! — Impossible to see a gentler, milder, more feminine creature, than the woman under whose wing Harriet had acquired such heavenly serenity of nature. It was a strange proof of the force of prejudice, that she did not foresee the same dangers for her niece from mingling in the fashionable circle at Mandevale, as in a promiscuous ball-room. But her mind was

swayed by a single fixed idea. In Mrs. Brookes's opinion, love was, of necessity, born amid the clang of an orchestra, and the flaring of chandeliers!—Whereas the Hall was a safe place. Lord Mandevale was her landlord, Lady Mandevale her friend; and the guests collected round them were persons belonging to those higher classes of society, which have little in common with a condemned regiment. For to the simple apprehension of one whose days had been divided between two country villages—the one where she saw the light, and the one where (as the birthplace of her lost love, and burial-place of his family) she hoped to resign it—rank and fortune were inseparable.

I was wrong, perhaps, not to set her right on this point early in our acquaintance. But I had never suffered Harriet to remain in error; and it was her fault—if she could have a fault—that Mrs. Brookes was not duly apprized of my being nearly as bad a

match as the poor fellow who had gone die at Barbadoes. For, though the little mild old lady liked me all the better for my red coat (as she would have done her nephew Barty, but for his contemptuous neglect), I doubt whether her predilection would have been increased by learning in how many respects the resemblance held good.—God knows I would have laid down *my* life for Harriet!

I told her so—I am afraid I told her so—After the warning I had received from Barty, and the misery I knew to have been occasioned in the family by indiscreet attachments, I *ought*, perhaps, to have kept a sterner guard over my feelings. But I assure you, in all candour, dear readers,—such as you, at least, as are made of penetrable stuff,—whether it was possible for a young fellow of three and twenty, desperately in love, to sit morning after morning beside the piano of a girl who sang old ballads and Handel's songs

to him, as long as he chose to ask for them, in tones that wrung tears out of his heart; or between the two work-tables established on either side the fireplace of that neat, snug little drawing-room, so simply yet so tastefully furnished, where every thing was so completely in its place, that, after spending a certain number of hours there, I fancied even *I* must have a right to be there,—I only ask you, I say, whether it was possible to preserve one's frigid reason in the midst of such intoxicating enjoyments?—

As the sister of my friend, as the chosen of my heart, she seemed so much my own, that, for the life and soul of me, I could not forbear imploring her sympathy in that miserable want of fortune, which precluded me from entreating her permission to demand her hand!

CHAPTER IV.

In wooing her, I found her of more value
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags.

SHAKSPEARE.

You perhaps imagine, gentle reader, that on my return to London, my friendship with Barty became cemented into still warmer intimacy by my passion for his sister?—

On the contrary, a wall of ice seemed to have arisen between us! In his company, I felt guilty and ashamed. After replying frankly to the inquiry which accompanied his first shake-hands, of “whether I had seen the old lady and Harriet,” that both were well, and much mortified by his systematic silence, I satisfied my conscience by apprising him

that his predictions had come to pass—that neither argument nor persuasion had induced Mrs. Brookes to sanction the appearance of her niece at the Bury ball.

“Right—quite right!” cried he. “Why inspire poor Harriet with a taste for pleasures which her fortune will never enable her to enjoy?”—

“People take their daughters to such places,” said I, endeavouring to smile, “expressly that they may accomplish the fortunes enabling them to enjoy them.”

“Husband-hunting, eh?—For that, Heaven be thanked, my old maid of an aunt is too highminded!”—

“Still,” pleaded I, “if, in a ball-room, people’s means and appliances were scrupulously examined, surely few would show a better title to be there, than Miss Brookes?”

“As the old lady is luckily of the same way of thinking as myself, we will not dispute the matter!” said he. “Enough that a

ball room marred the happiness for life of *one* of the family !—But for my aunt's imprudent attachment, she might have made more than one good match, and secured happiness for herself and a thousand advantages for us all."

By all this, I saw that the moment was not propitious for confiding to him all that Harriet had determined to renounce for my sake ; or assuring him that *my* future happiness was comprehended in the little drawing-room at Oak Hill. And, by a natural consequence, concealment begat coldness. I began to see less of him ;—partly, because I felt like a liar and hypocrite in his company ;—partly, because the discontents engendered by his bootless aspirations after riches rendered it insupportable. A third son having been born at Wrenhurst, there was no longer the smallest chance of assistance in that quarter. Sir Robert expressed himself somewhat peevishly, indeed, in announcing this

rapid increase of his olive branches ; though he was careful to add that never was man blessed with so thrifty and frugal a wife. But, according to his account, poor Emmy was beginning to deny herself the necessaries of life, in order that the junior branches might be properly provided for.

Much to the advantage of my purse and my constancy, our battalion was just then quartered at Windsor. We led a quiet life of it. At that time, there was no railway to whisk one from Slough to London and back, "ere one could say, it lightens;" and our fellows were consequently forced to content themselves with glimpses of their London loves, on such rare occasions as Ascot Races, Eton Montem, or the Rowing Match.

By way of cloak to the consciousness of having his heart full and his pockets empty, Barty, under these circumstances, affected the country gentleman ; a character which his skill in athletic exercises enabled him to sup-

port with more credit than most of his brother officers. As the best bat at Lord's, he carried the day in whatever cricket-match he chose to engage; and in our rowing-matches to Maidenhead Bridge, no one ventured to bet against the boat among whose crew was Barty Brookes.

From a natural preference of my barrack-room, with its sketch-books and music-books, to pastimes that took one out under a broiling sun in the dog-days, I was voted a spoony. But I was not the less interested in the manly triumphs of my friend.

Still, this discrepancy of habits served to widen the distance between us. As a sportsman, Barty was led to form a hundred new connections of whom I knew nothing. Invitations poured in upon him;—and whenever at mess I inquired “what had become of Brookes,” I was sure to be answered that he was dining at Maidenhead, or Bracknell, or Englefield Green. He was becoming as po-

pular in the country as ever he had been about town.

Too much occupied with the lights and shadows of my own heart to take heed whether these absences of Barty were attributed oftenest to Bracknell, Maidenhead, or Englefield Green, I had some difficulty in making out the meaning of certain significant smiles which, towards the end of summer, began to curl the lips of my brother officers whenever I inquired where Barty was dining. Even when they answered me in so many words, "at Datchet!" — even when Lord James threw himself back in his chair and crowed like chanticleer at my simplicity,—I was not much the wiser.

"You are really *impayable*, my dear Percy!" cried he. "Where do you put your eyes, ears, and understanding, not to know that Barty dines to-day where he dined yesterday, and will dine to-morrow, if he can

persuade you to be such an ass as take his guard for him—at Datchet!”—

“ But there is no *inn* at Datchet ?”—said I, as if fancying a Botham’s the only dining-place for young guardsmen ; —“ and who on earth can he possibly know there ?”

“ Better ask him, to-night, when he comes home !—Perhaps he may take the question better from *you* than he has from *us* !”—

I did ask him on the morrow ; and his answer, so far from being pettish, as Lord James’s hints had prepared me to expect, was more gracious than anything I had extracted from him since my visit to Suffolk. My suspicions were almost excited by his unusual amenity. His softened manner argued of the man in love.

“ I dined at Datchet Mead,” said he, in answer to my inquiry. “ I dined at the Stanleys’ .”

“ The Stanleys ? — Anything to Lord Derby ?”—

“ Not that I am aware of—kind, hospitable people—but not what men like Lord James understand by people of the world.”

“ And young ?”—

“ The portion of the family in whom youth is a merit, cannot be called old,” replied Barty, without resenting my inquisitiveness.

“ *Mrs.* Stanley is not above five-and-twenty, and as pretty as five-and-twenty ought to be. —Stanley is past fifty.”

I could now understand why so many mouths were screwed up at mess, whenever I inquired “ what Barty could possibly be doing at Datchet ?” and determined to inquire further on the subject, though not of *him* ! I was afraid my dear Harriet’s brother might be in danger !

“ Burn his fingers ?— Yes, I should think he *would* burn his fingers !”—was Lord James’s ready reply to my cross-questioning. —

“ Stanley is anything but a man to be trifled with. Stanley is surly and burly as an ogre.”

“ And his lady as pretty as Barty represents her?”

“ At all events, pretty enough to pass for an angel, in country quarters! Their place, too, is a pleasant, cool, quaint, green kind of place. Lisbon House, they call it,—because built and inhabited in Charles the Second’s time by some Portuguese ambassador.—The curious evergreens with which the gardens are darkened, are said to have been planted in his time.”

“ I don’t care about the evergreens,—I want to know about Mrs. Stanley.—Is she dangerous? Is she clever as well as pretty?”

“ The most dangerous women I recognize, my dear fellow, are pretty fools!”—retorted Lord James. “ A blue beauty, like the rattlesnake, carries her own antidote. But Mrs. Stanley is, I fancy, neither a genius nor a natural. The sort of person one finds it convenient to dine with twice a week—that is, after recommend-

ing her husband a new wine merchant, and establishing oneself on the footing of sending one's clothes to the house to dress."

"And is it on *this* system Barty Brookes is living with the Stanleys?"—

"He is a greater fool than I take him for if he accept them on any other! Stanley is a regular snob—a reading man—the sort of fellow only seen at the Alfred, or Thorpe's book sales. But as he is wise enough to perceive that Barty's assiduities relieve him from the *peine forte et dure* of entertaining his foolish wife, and are far less exceptionable than if she had taken up with some Ensign Smith, or the curate of the parish, our friend is allowed to make *la pluie et le beau temps* in the house."

A sad account this; for, glibly as such things are talked of in their opening chapter, there comes a time when smooth becomes rough, and the friends who have jested so pleasantly and barefacedly on the *liaison*

resent being subpœnaed to give evidence in a witness-box. But Barty and I were sufficiently friends for me to say to him, in an off-hand manner,—“Take care you do not get into a scrape! With a couple so ill matched in respect to age as the Stanleys, it is always ten to one that the husband wants to get rid of his wife.”

“And the wife of her husband! But, trust me, I am not the cat’s-paw for such a purpose. I have too much respect for the holy institution of matrimony, not to be carefully on my guard.”

I was too much absorbed, just then, by my own feelings, to interest myself in the affairs of strangers. Mr. Stanley was to *me* only a name. I had not so much as seen him; and, as he was decidedly of an age to take care both of himself and his wife, I left him to his fate.

At the period in question, the private drives in Windsor Park and Forest were even more

strictly reserved than now. A few families of consideration in the neighbourhood, however, were favoured with keys; and during the absence of the royal family from the Castle a key of office belonging to a person high in the household was at the disposal of Brookes, myself, and one or two other of my brother officers.

I was pretty nearly the only one of them who ever profited by the privilege. A man in love delights in the loneliest of haunts; and there was something soothing in the noble sweep of evergreens adjoining the Virginia water,—the long, long shrubbery, with its short herbage, seldom travelled by a heavier footfall than the scudding rabbits abounding on the spot, or any other living thing but the wood pigeons, whose shadows flitted across the turf, as they winged their way high over head, in the sunshine.

Of late, however, I had been several times disappointed in my application for the key.

“ Captain Brookes” (all young officers are captains to a footman,) had been beforehand with me.

I was a little surprised : for Barty was a man to prefer the Long Walk, or the London road, or any other of the king’s highways, to rural privacy. I had never expected to find my solitary haunts invaded by Barty !—

As it was impossible for both the kings of Brentford to reign at once on the spot, I had no means of verifying whether he appropriated the key to his own use, or that of some friend. He seldom dined at mess ; and, when we met on duty, there were other matters to be discussed.

One sultry summer day, however, when the heat of the weather suggested to the utmost the charm of the gloomy pine walk, with its resinous shade, and the glassy surface of the Virginia water glittering at intervals between, to suggest sensations of freshness and coolness, I was so fortunate as

to monopolize the key. By an early application, I forestalled my brother officers ; and was off, with a biscuit and a volume of Wordsworth in my pocket, before the eyes of fashionable young gentlemen, like Barty Brookes and Lord James, were half unclosed ! I intended to muse away the day, till dinner-time, in the neighbourhood of the Belvedere.

I was monarch of all I surveyed. The Court was away. Not a human being was stirring, except at intervals a park-keeper, with his dog-whip under his arm, and a pointer puppy at his heels.

It struck me that to one of these worthies I must be an object of suspicion ; for I plainly saw him watching me from a distance ; and, when I moved from the position I had taken up, he appeared to be cautiously dogging me.

I had half a mind to go boldly up to the fellow, and satisfy any misgivings he might entertain about my right to be there, by exhi-

biting my official key. But the moment I started to fulfil my purpose, he was off with hastier strides than my own.

Shortly afterwards, having reached one of the heights commanding a view of the farm, as I stood looking down upon a field of buckwheat in full bloom that promised well for the royal pheasants, I discovered the same keeper, accompanied by a second, hurrying back towards the walk, as if desirous to have a witness of my presence.

At that moment, however, I was too much struck by the lowering aspect of the weather, to take further heed of his movements. A storm was coming on; and my only object was to hurry on towards the nearest gate, from which I was nearly a mile distant, that I might make my way into Black Ness road, for the chance of some passing vehicle to expedite my passage across the park.

Just as I reached within a hundred yards of the gate, it was impetuously opened from

without ; and in came the person I had noticed at a distance as accompanying the keeper, who, instead of a comrade, proved to be a middle-aged gentleman. For some unexplained reason, however, they certainly *had* been walking together, as companions. For, the moment the gate which formed a portion of the high palings was flung open, I saw him skulk off. But the glitter of the gold lace on his collar was perceptible, even at a distance, against the dark masses of the Portugal laurels.

At any other moment, my curiosity would have been excited by this strange intrusion. But the rain was, by this time, falling so heavily that, unprovided with an umbrella, all my care was to get under shelter, till the heavy thunder-shower was past. Already several sharp flashes had vivified the now gloomy expanse of the Virginia water ; and the thunder was booming with considerable grandeur among the surrounding hills.

I found leisure to appreciate its grandeur, by stationing myself to the windward of the lofty palings, so as to defy the pelting rain: and decided, on seeing the stranger establish himself in the same position, that the impetuous movements which had so surprised me originated in his anxiety to reach its shelter before the commencement of the storm.

“What mysteries,” thought I, “one is sometimes tempted to create out of the most trivial occurrences!—At a distance, I was half inclined to convert this gentlemanly old man into a constable!”—

Strange to tell, as the storm darkened, his countenance grew more cheerful. Cowering as we were side by side against the palings, that secured us from the driving rain, it was impossible to retain the reserve of strangeness; and, after mutually congratulating each other on not being exposed to such a downpour in the midst of the clayey

plain, we soon made acquaintance. I thought it odd, however, that when I deplored the disappointment of my day in the woods, *he* should hail the change of weather as if a blessing. He seemed in the highest spirits.—He was probably a farmer.—Perhaps the country wanted rain.

By degrees, as the patter upon the leaves of the evergreens grew less unremitting, our intimacy ripened. The kind-hearted old gentleman informed me that his carriage was waiting for him at Black Ness Gate, scarcely half a mile distant, and that, after leaving him at his house, it might convey me to the barracks. My buttons proved me to belong to the battalion of guards quartered at Windsor. But it was only after I had accepted his offer, and we were actually in the chariot together on the high road, that he announced *his* name to be—Stanley!—

By the time we approached the old

crumbling brick-wall of Lisbon House, with its projecting summer-house at each angle of the garden, and a profusion of white and red snapdragon starting from every crevice, we had so warmed into friendship, that he insisted upon my accompanying him home to dinner.

“As the friend of his young friend Mr. Brookes, he knew me perfectly by name and reputation. He could not think of allowing me to take an hour’s drive in my wet clothes. He would send off a groom to Windsor for my servant. I should have Mr. Brookes’s room.”

I must tell you that this spontaneous glow of old Stanley in my favour appeared to arise from my answer to his interrogation as to whether I was in the habit of frequenting the walk where our encounter took place.

“Almost daily!”—was my frank reply. And there was something so fervent in the murmur

of "Thank God !" that escaped his lips, as to place me instantly on my guard.

I now saw clearly that I *had* been watched : but watched only because mistaken for another.

When, therefore, my kind host proceeded to inquire whether my friend Mr. Brookes had not *also* a key of the private drives, or access to such a key, I replied evasively, that " if he had, I should think him the last man in the regiment likely to take advantage of it. Brookes was always boating or cricketing.—Brookes was too fond of noise and society, to find pleasure in such haunts."

" I thought so—I said so—I was sure it would turn out to be a mistake !"—exclaimed the delighted old man. " Idle people are so fond of making mischief !"—

And it was not for me to acquaint him how completely he was betraying his feelings.

“ How should the keepers know one officer from another !”—added he, as if talking to himself. “ They are nearly of a height.—I knew it would turn out a mistake !”

CHAPTER V.

They say the devil snake did tempt the woman.
But, ha! ha! ha! *who* tempted *him* to tempt?
Give me good answer there?—Why, 'twas the woman.
The fiend found somewhat which did stir his blood
(If blood he had,)—some sting—some appetite.
The love of evil?—Well, what caused the love?
What was't that first begot the insane touch
Which crept amidst his bright and rancorous scales?
What sight—or sound—or dream?—'Twas she! the
WOMAN!

BARRY CORNWALL.

A flower-garden is always doubly delicious after a thunder-shower. But I do not remember to have been ever more struck by the fragrance and freshness of a spot, no, not even of Oak Hill, than by the quaint old garden at Lisbon House.

I hate a modern villa. There is an ostenta-

tion of pert insignificance about the architectural attempts of such places, with their ridiculous serpentine walks, fanciful grass-plots, and shrubberies like an embroidered cambric handkerchief too transparent for use, which strikes me as ludicrous and offensive.

But I love the honest brick-built wayside country house, within gates; its half-a-dozen acres, surrounded by a high wall; its green lawn as square as a sheet of paper; its undeviating paths rectangular as New Harmony; its fine old cedar, solitary as its sundial. The garden at Lisbon House was full of old-fashioned trees and old-fashioned flowers. It might have sheltered the learned leisure of Sir William Temple. In spite of its Portuguese designation, it was as Dutch as if transplanted from the Hague!—

I can almost fancy myself inhaling at this moment the overgrown masses of honeysuckle, sweetbriar, and jessamine, clinging to the old

walls; and the fraxinella, and dying strawberry leaves, throwing out, as Bacon hath it, "a fine cordial smell."

"Mrs. Stanley will be ready to welcome us. Yes, I am pretty sure Mrs. Stanley must be at home. The storm seems to have fallen as heavy here as at Black Ness, so that perhaps my absence may have made her uneasy," observed my companion, when, the huge iron gates having been thrown open, we rolled round the old-fashioned forecourt, and stopped at a door, the sides of whose lofty granite steps were clothed with greenhouse plants. And already I was beginning to enter so thoroughly into his situation, as to follow the glancing of his eye with the utmost anxiety along the façade of the mansion; hoping, as he did, to detect the gleam of a white dress on the look-out for him, at one of the windows. It would have been a comfort to me to know that the storm *had* rendered Mrs. Stanley anxious.

No vestige of her, however! Only a venerable, gray-headed butler, who met us in the hall, full of interest in his master's wet garments. He seemed indignant when Mr. Stanley, instead of listening to his suggestions of an immediate change, kept inquiring about his lady, and pushing his way across the hall, through an old oak passage with a domed and painted ceiling, towards a certain square cedar parlour, opening to the flower-garden at the rear of the house, which was nearly four feet below its level.

There, indeed, we found the lady of the house; neither anxious nor alarmed, but quietly occupied with her work, as though stitching were the object of her life. As we entered the room, she raised her expressive eyes (which Lord James had amused himself with comparing to sapphires set with diamonds) to her husband's face; and in a moment I was forced to admit, that to lose even so much as *one* of those looks of hers, must

be, indeed, a loss! I no longer wondered that, if Mr. Stanley had reason to suspect her of wandering occasionally in the Belvedere walk with Barty, he should think it worth while to verify the fact, even in the teeth of a thunder-storm.

When presented to her by her husband, I saw that my name was already familiar to her, as Barty's friend. Though still agitated by the violence of the recent storm, so that the rich bands of her dark brown hair were disturbed and dishevelled by the hands on which she had been resting her aching temples, she instantly exerted herself to please. One knows so well when a woman *tries* to please! And though the chances are, that she would please three times as much by *not* trying, the *effort* is gratifying, however unsatisfactory the result.

Mrs. Stanley took such care that I should be comfortably installed in the room usually appropriated to "my friend," and that no

time should be lost in fetching my things, and making me at home, that, before dinner was served, I was half in love with her myself. Before it was *over*, I had sworn a second oath to myself that her happiness should not be sacrificed to the selfish vanity of an idle ensign in country quarters. I found in the Mr. Stanley appropriated by Lord James as "a regular snob" in manners, one of the most amiable of men, and in mind one of the best informed. Hospitable too, to excess,—almost to a fault;—or, so soon after his cause to regret the introduction of one guardsman into his house, he would scarcely have been so rash as, without cause or necessity, to become the host of another.

But I saw he fancied change of society as indispensable as the air she breathed to the happiness of his young wife; and though it distracted him to watch her in company with her admirers, he had not courage to see her pining with ennui. It was like a

doating parent, unable to withhold pernicious sweetmeats from his child !

Pleasant as was the evening I thus unexpectedly spent in the society of those who had previously so highly raised my curiosity, it was deteriorated by regret at contemplating happiness so nearly perfect as seemed within their reach, in danger of being injured, past redemption, to enliven the idle hours of a purposeless boy. In higher life and gayer scenes, I had witnessed, without much remorse, the domestic peace of more than one noble husband in similar peril. But the unreality and artificiality of *their* lives seemed to guarantee them against any fatal degree of heartbreak on the discovery of their wrongs. As Charles Lamb observes, to palliate our toleration of the immorality of the old comedies, " Nobody cares who is the father of Lord Froth's or Sir Paul Pliant's children."

But it was not so at Lisbon House. *There* was no glitter of fortune.—*There* was no pre-

tension to distinction. Mr. Stanley was descended from a lawyer who had risen to public honours under the patronage of Sir Robert Walpole. The utmost opulence of his successors did not exceed two thousand a year; and he lived in his square old house, as his grandfather had done before him, in comfort, but not luxury. The family pictures on the walls were those of neither baron nor senator; but prim-looking gentlemen in tie-wigs, with prim-looking ladies in gray tabby with white bibs and tuckers; the highly respectable ancestors of a highly respectable race, who still ate and drank out of the old-fashioned plate and Chelsea china they had bequeathed them; and it was Mrs. Stanley's own fault that she did not also parade the same strings of garnets, and ill-set rose diamonds, that figured in the portrait in crayons of Mr. Stanley's grandmother.

The servants in attendance were old family servants; the books on the bookshelves were

old family books. Nothing new or fresh within those walls, but the lovely young woman, who seemed to have crossed its threshold in an evil hour for her own destiny, and that of its inmates.

Whether the mischief perpetrated in that house by my friend Barty were already irreparable, was an enigma which I exercised my utmost power of discernment to unravel. I watched both husband and wife; watched them in the trifles that afford the strongest indications of mutual attachment or mutual aversion; and before the close of the evening, had made up my mind that the gray-haired yet sensitive old man was perplexed by agonizing mistrust of all that was going on under his eyes; while to Mrs. Stanley, the man who had married her chiefly to secure an honourable home to the unprotected and necessitous orphan of a friend, was an object of disgust.—I noticed her, when she thought no one was observing, remove the

cup of tea he had poured out, and prepare another for herself; and, remembering the anecdote of Napoleon touching Sir Hudson Lowe and the coffee-cup, made a shrewd guess at the nature of her feelings.

Impossible to pass over in silence my visit to Lisbon House. I hurried to Barty's barrack-room the following day, expressly to inform him that I had made the acquaintance of his friend, and warn him that Mr. Stanley had taken to morning walks in the shrubberies adjoining the Virginia Water. But to this point of information, the fractious fellow never suffered me to reach.

"What the devil took you to the Stanleys?"—cried he, after the opening phrase of my discourse.—"They are nothing to *you*, nor you to *them*!—You seem to take delight in introducing yourself to all to whom I have private reasons for wishing you to remain a stranger!"

This was ungracious and provoking enough.

But I thought of Harriet, and was resolved not to be affronted.

“Were I to explain to you,” said I, “the accident which brought me in contact with the Stanleys, you would perceive that the introduction was as much to *your* advantage as mine.”

“As I am neither superannuated nor paralytic, I can assure you that I feel fully competent to the management of my own affairs,” was his peevish rejoinder, by which I was sufficiently vexed to determine on leaving him to his ill-humour.

When I came, however, to turn over in my mind all that had fallen from Mr. Stanley, and my conviction that the keepers had been bribed to watch, in consequence of information he had received concerning the morning promenades of Barty and his wife, it went against my conscience not to place the former on his guard.

Conquering my resentment, therefore,

within ten minutes, I returned into the room I had quitted; and, in spite of his surly looks, related to him circumstantially every particular of my interview with Stanley.

At the close of my communication, Barty rose from his seat, and came towards me, extending his hand.

"Thanks!"—said he. "You have done me a great service! Forgive my having been so great a brute just now. But, on such points, most men are captious. I am afraid," added Barty, with one of the open smiles which so well became his handsome face, "that on *most* points I am captious. A disappointed fellow like myself is apt to take the world *en grippe*."

"I was in hopes you did not include me with the rest of the world!"—said I.

"I ought not, for you are a good fellow, and have proved a steady friend!" sighed Barty; and this allusion sealed my lips at once; for I felt certain he alluded to the one

or two emergencies in which my purse had been open to him, rather than to the warm regard which placed my arm and heart at his disposal every day of the year.

“The truth is,” continued Barty, as if arguing with himself, “that to a fellow situated as I am, every idle chatterbox presumes to offer advice;—till, hunted into a corner, one turns like a tiger at bay upon friend and foe. That conceited ass, Lord James, is always at me about the Stanleys. What is it to *him*, I should like to know, whether I dine or sleep too often at Lisbon House, or whether my company is as acceptable to the husband as the wife? Except indeed that when we arrived together at Windsor, he endeavoured to obtain the same advantages, and was most egregiously snubbed!”—

“But I, my dear Brookes, never aspired to the same advantages,” pleaded I, eager to lead him to the more important part of the

question; "and you may therefore believe in my unprejudiced assurance, that your intimacy in the house is likely to be productive of lasting misery to all parties."

"Like Joseph Surface, in short, you are afraid that I have lately given that worthy man, Sir Peter, much uneasiness," said Barty, bursting into a provoking laugh. "My dear friend, you don't know old Stanley. Old Stanley is a man who had passed through life without a sensation, till he had the supreme luck to make my acquaintance;—a mere bookworm, a fossil specimen, without passions and without joys. Surely he ought to thank rather than reproach me, for giving a fillip to his languid existence."

"Commend me to the gratitude of a person enjoying a state of perfect ease and contentment, to those who have subjected him to pain and torment!"

"In that case," was Barty's careless re-

joinder, "you are still heart-whole ; or you would know that

The sweet perplexities of love,
Whose agony delights,

are torments ever to be thankful for."

"But Mr. Stanley's perplexities are not exactly those of *love*!" persisted I, trusting to exhaust his vein of levity, and bring him to reason. "And I can assure you, my dear Barty, that there are moments when the expression of his eyes, as they rest upon that beautiful creature—"

"She *is* beautiful — is she not?" — interrupted he, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Denoted feelings which a soul in torment would have shrunk from!" continued I, without administering the flattering unction he demanded. "And you ought seriously to reflect before you endanger Mrs. Stanley's position in society, and still more, her position in the happy home of an indulgent

husband, whether you have so much as food and raiment to offer her, should your conduct cause her to be expelled from under his roof."

"Ay, there it is—there it is!" cried Barty. "Poverty, always poverty!—always one's miserable, grinding, penniless condition staring one in the face! If I were rich enough to maintain Mrs. Stanley in case of extremity, the deuce a bit would you trouble your head about the immoralities of the affair. These qualms of conscience of yours, my dear Percy, are caused by the chance of our coming upon the parish,—not of our going to the devil."

"I would rather find you safe from both extremes!"—replied I, determined not to be piqued. "But do me the justice to admit that, though I have heard of little else at mess but your flirtation, for the last six weeks, I never annoyed you by the slightest allusion

to it, till my insight into the domestic happiness you were destroying inspired me with the feelings of remorse that *ought* to be your own."

"Domestic happiness!"—reiterated Barty, with a scornful shrug of the shoulders; "what an abuse of terms, or what hypocritical self-deception! *Can* you, in all honesty, apply one of the holiest words in the language to such a connection as that of the Stanleys?"—

"Are they not married then?"—cried I, with the most *naïf* simplicity.

"Married?—to be sure they are,—according to the canons of the Holy Mother Church,—if you call *that* matrimony! But where was the better feeling that should prompt or accompany such a sacrament?—Where was the devoted attachment which is the very soul of marriage?—The match was a mere bargain—as much an affair of money as the purchasing a horse or a register-stove!

Ethel was the orphan daughter of one of Stanley's friends; a public accountant, who, finding himself a defaulter, had not courage to look his disgrace in the face, and blew out his brains. The world considered it an act of wonderful generosity on the part of Stanley, who was a rich old bachelor, that he fitted out the son for India (where he died), and placed the daughter at school, where perhaps she had better have died also.—Cold-blooded rogue!—Aware that he possessed no single quality capable of attaching a woman's heart, he thus bought himself a wife:—bought her by the slow, economical process of yearly instalments. When Ethel grew up, she found herself without a home, and encumbered with a benefactor.”

“And *without* a benefactor, what would have become of her?”—interrupted I.

“I suppose it was *that* consideration which determined the poor girl to give him her hand. Their relative position did not admit

of her residing, as an unmarried girl, under his roof; and, rather than remain at the country school which formed her only alternative, she almost proposed to him to make her his wife."

"And you blame him for accepting?"

"Blame him, and execrate him! She was an artless child. He an artful, calculating wretch, who had created the predicament requiring such an extrication. Had Stanley been the high-souled man of honour you endeavour to make him out, he would have said to the poor girl, 'Here is the capital of the income I have hitherto devoted to you. Marry a man of your own age and pursuits.'"

"And where was such a person to be found by a girl immured in a boarding-school?—Absurd!—Mrs. Stanley realized her wish of emancipation, though perhaps at the sacrifice of his own comfort for life."

"A mighty sacrifice, to marry a lovely girl of eighteen!"—

“A girl of eighteen is a thorny rose for the bosom of a man of fifty,—as the sequel has proved!”—

“His meanness has only met with fitting retribution. It is enough, by Heaven, to disgust one with one’s species, and make one curse the day one was born, to see the influence exercised by money over all the finer feelings of human nature!—It is not the mortification of wearing a seedy coat, or being splashed by some saucy fool as one tramps in spatterdashes, that renders poverty so galling a grievance. But to find the affections one covets forestalled, like places at a theatre, by the first beast who comes with ready money in his hand!”—

“I will not hear you utter such treason,” said I, starting indignantly from my chair; for with Harriet enshrined in my heart, it little became me to listen to blasphemy against the sex.

“Do not deny, unless you can disprove!”

retorted Barty. "Look at me!—Look at my destinies!—When I quitted old Broadham's cursed double-faced penitentiary, that girl who, like all the rest of the world, believed me sure of a gentleman's inheritance, had promised to be mine the moment I was able to claim her hand.—She wore my hair,—she wore the ring that sealed our troth-plight. For some time, we corresponded: and it was only her pretended terror lest our letters should be intercepted and means taken to prevent our further intercourse, that induced me to relinquish the correspondence. Without fear, however. For her last letter to me swore, by all the pretty oaths a woman has at her command, that, if she remained weeks, months, years, without hearing from me, so long as she knew me to be alive, so long would she be faithful to her word!—You know the rest.—My brother came and bought me out of her heart!—He was rich, and I was poor. It was enough!—Nay—my very prospects in life,

such as they were, were sacrificed without mercy to repay her treachery by lining her pockets with gold !”

“ You had surely little to lament in losing a wife capable of such baseness !” was my sincere rejoinder.

“ And now, look at my second dilemma !” cried Barty.—“ After the conduct of Emmy, apparently one of the simplest-hearted of God’s creatures, I sealed my soul for the remainder of my days ; and vowed that nothing should again induce me to put faith in woman. You must have noticed how carefully I abstained from female society. The whole tenor of my life was changed : tennis and billiards, the river or the meadow, sufficed me.—Chance threw me in the way of the Stanleys. At first, it was the quiet gentlemanly old man I sought ; who was never weary of taking down the missals and black-letter books from his library for my amusement. I liked his old Madeira, and his old house. I thought so, at

least. But perhaps all the time I deceived myself. Perhaps, from the first, it was his young wife that attached me to Datchet. On the day, however, that I first owned as much to myself, it was simply because I had learned her story,—simply because I knew her to be a victim. — Since that time, I have ceased to ask myself questions on the subject.—I take the day as it comes, with its pains and pleasures, without care for the morrow. And but that you have wrenched all this out of my heart, my dear Percy, by your direct interrogation, should never, even in the secrecy of my chamber, have endeavoured to untwist the entangled skein.”

Touched to the quick by this unwonted frankness, earnestly did I adjure him, now that his heart was open, to cleanse it to the utmost of the perilous stuff that threatened danger to so many—. I appealed to his sense of justice, — I appealed to his

generosity,—to his pride!—But, alas! my friend Barty

had ceased
To justify his deeds unto himself,—
The last infirmity of evil !

I could only entrust his fate to the care of a Providence, mightier than that of friendship itself!—

CHAPTER VI.

Faith fills the vacant place
Which young affection's absence makes. The man
Who builds the temple of his happiness
On love alone, has but a poor foundation :
But he who roots his hope in virtue's soil
May mock the seasons' change. His home stands firm
A tower of adamant, unmov'd amidst
The storms of fortune.

LORD BEAUMONT.

A few days after this conversation, we were invited to dine together with the Stanleys. I was about to excuse myself, when Barty entreated me so earnestly to accept the invitation, that, fancying he wished to place a restraint on his own conduct by the presence of an interested observer, I complied.

Scarcely was my note gone when, to my infinite mortification he added, " Had you pleaded

an engagement, you see, I should have been forced to decline the use of Stanley's carriage, which he has offered to send for us. I could not have had it out for myself alone."

"And you literally allow him to *send* for you?"—cried I with increasing indignation.

"Why not?—It exercises his horses, which *his studious habits* and Ethel's sedentary ones would otherwise leave to die of fat. By her own will, Mrs. Stanley would never stir further than from the house to the garden, and back again. People affect to pity Turkish and Chinese wives; whereas, half the women in the world, were their instincts consulted, would prefer the same mode of existence."

I saw he was trying to lead me from the question of his unprincipled selfishness;—and, to avoid a quarrel, was forced to submit to be led.

As we were on our way to dine at Lisbon House, Barty took occasion to observe, while reclining in a corner of poor old Stanley's

carriage, that, if I did not object, he would order it early to go home. "He had a letter to write for the morrow's post, which, having a long day's duty before him, he did not care to postpone."

It was so unusual a thing for Barty to talk about letters as a matter of consequence, that I inquired, as he probably intended I should, whether another olive branch was sprouting at Wrenhurst, to require his congratulations; or whether old Broadham kept up a correspondence with him now that their guardianship account was balanced.

"Broadham still acts as my banker," said he.—"In these bad times, a friend in the city is no bad thing, to put one in the way of getting better interest for one's money. The bothering letter I have got to write to-night, however, is to my worthy aunt."

Saying which, he took from his pocket a letter from Mrs. Brookes, both crossed and recrossed; the third page of which contained

a few lines in the well-known handwriting of Harriet !

“ Insignificant as I may appear to Sir Robert and the Tartuffes of Hypocrisy House,”—said he, with a scornful smile, “ I still remain the oracle of the petticoats of the family. My sister and aunt have prodigious confidence in my opinion. With *them* my year nay suffices.”

“ They appear to have made a somewhat lengthy appeal to your judgment on the present occasion,” I rejoined, glancing at the letter, while all the blood in my body seemed tingling in my ears ; so convinced was I that it bore reference to myself.

“ Lengthy and unreasonable ! They want me to decide for them whether Harriet is to accept a man I have never seen ; and of whom, previous to this rigmarole letter, I had never heard !—It was therefore necessary to supply me with more facts and features than any thing short of my poor aunt’s leisure and

circumstantiality could ever have found means to commit to paper."

I was speechless!—This man, whom I had been provoking, this man whom I had been frustrating in his purposes, held in his hand the fiat of my happiness or misery for life!

"And which way do you intend to turn the scale?" said I, jocosely; flattering myself I had assumed an air of perfect unconcern.—
"To wed or not to wed—that is the question."

"I am disposed to say—to wed!" replied Barty, with all the nonchalance I was vainly endeavouring to assume. "Harriet is now nearly of age—nay, by Jove! nearly two and twenty.—Her prospects are far from brilliant. In the event of my aunt's death, she has no one to depend upon but myself; and I need not tell you that I find number one almost more than I am able to take care of. She wants a home, in short; and a home, and a happy and brilliant one, this new Romeo of hers is able to afford her."

Oh ! what a heart-sickness came upon me, as I listened ! Though the windows of the carriage were all down, I literally gasped for breath.

“ You see how right I was,” resumed Barty, taking no more heed of my agitation than one does of the gapings of a gold fish in its globe, “ in confirming the old lady’s objection to public balls. If women would only remain quiet, *partis* are sure to present themselves. Half a dozen London seasons would not have secured a better match for my sister than this Lord Donnington. Donnington has a clear twenty thousand a-year !”

Lucky for me that we were already within sight of the old snapdragoned wall. It was *impossible* to retain much longer my air of equanimity.

“ Such a marriage could scarcely fail to please me,” added Barty ; “ as my sister, being thus nobly provided for, I naturally insure the inheritance of the old lady.”

“ But you do not mean,” cried I, hurriedly, just as we reached the iron gates, “ that you would sacrifice the happiness of Miss Brookes for the attainment of a few thousand pounds ? ” —

“ Sacrifice her happiness ? — Of course not ! But when a girl’s affections are disengaged (as I know Harriet’s to be), I can conceive no possible obstacle to her happiness in such a match as the one that presents itself.”

We were already in the hall. We were soon in the oak passage. No possibility of rejoinder, even though my heart was bursting. The announcement of our names compelled me to answer the formal compliments of the Stanleys, and a thousand idle questions from the numerous party assembled. But I spoke like a fool. I could scarcely disentangle my perplexed thoughts. Had Harriet *really* confided to her brother her indifference to me — her readiness to become the wife of another ? — Or was all this only the result of

a petty vengeance employed to punish my observations on his intimacy with the Stanleys? Had she commissioned him to apprise me of Lord Donnington's proposal; or was the intimation a volunteer of his own?—

So thoroughly was I beginning to mistrust the man capable of such a game as I saw him playing at Datchet, that I determined to address myself at once to his sister, for a solution of the mystery. The straight road is ever the shortest. Harriet's answer might break my heart; but, at least, it would set my mind at rest.

How unreal appeared everything that was passing around me that day at Lisbon House! I seemed to be moving in a dream. All was mockery—all was bewilderment. To the gravest questions that were addressed to me, I fancy I answered with a hollow laugh; and more than once in the course of the evening the kind-hearted Mr. Stanley inquired whether

I felt ill. Lord James, who was of the party, (which he treated with the cool insolence of dropping in towards the middle of the second course) could scarcely restrain his merriment at the strange blunders of which I was guilty at the whist-table. But even *he* laughed no longer, when he heard me, in a fit of pre-occupation, address our fair hostess by the name of Mrs. Bröokes.

I forgave all his impertinence, however, on finding that he had settled to accompany Barty and myself on our return.

"You must book me to-night in your Datchet omnibus, my dear Barty," said he, "for my horse is knocked up." And, in the joy of thus escaping a second *tête-à-tête* with Harriet's brother, I turned a deaf ear to his ungrateful allusions to the man of whose hospitality he was partaking.

But, though firm in my intention of appealing to Miss Brookes for an explanation of her intentions, no sooner did I find myself pen in

hand, with the paper before me, than I became sensible of the trying nature of the task I had undertaken. What was I to say to her? Persuade her to renounce the most brilliant prospects in favour of one who had so little to offer besides his love?—Remind her of promises she seemed disposed to forget, and urge her to throw herself away in defiance of the dictates of her reason—the advice of her family—the remonstrances of her friends?—

Many hours did I consume in writing and re-writing all that was passing in my mind. A grand mistake!—for in matters of feeling, the first letter written is the one to be sent; as surely as in matters of business, it ought to be re-considered. And so, after wasting half the night in copying, and tearing, and amending, the result of all my vacillations was an epistle as hard as if indited by old Broadham, or an Old Bailey counsel! I cannot understand how a fellow, so miserable

as I was at that moment, could have got words together to create such a stern, savage, heartless performance. But having sealed up, as poison to *her*, the well-springs of sensibility overflowing in my heart, there was nothing left for it but to say—"Marry him, if you choose.—Marry him, as most women would in your place. I once thought you different from other women. But no matter!—Marry this lord.—You will perjure yourself.—But again, no matter!—you have my consent,—I fully absolve you!—Marry him."

Four days were to elapse before I could receive the answer; and what days they were!—There was a rowing-match at Maidenhead, in which Barty insisted on engaging me. *He* was in the highest glee. Convinced that his letter to Mrs. Brookes would determine his sister's resolution, and that he was about to acquire a happier home at Donnington Castle than he had lost at Wrenhurst,

he was in towering spirits. We dined at Maidenhead. The losing party gave the dinner, and attempted to drown their chagrin in floods of champagne; and we drove home in two drags, at night, in such a state, that it was a great mercy only one of them was upset, and that nothing but the traces, the carriage, and the collar-bone of a single tender ensign, were broken.

Never shall I forget the remainder of that night! Oppressed as I was with fatigue and headache, I determined to sit up and wait the arrival of the post. I could not sleep till I had received Harriet's letter. But though it was easy to remain watching the gradual enlightening of the heavens—the transition from deep sapphire to greenish gray—dappling into the brighter tints of morn, till the full burst of the glorious effulgence of day—there was pain, amounting to agony, in the feverish sensation produced by excess and anxiety of mind;—the thirst that no

water would slake—the throbbing which no philosophy could tranquillize.

At last I heard the step upon the stairs—the knock at the door! The letter was before me. The letter was in my hands. But they trembled so, that, slight as was the seal, some minutes elapsed before I had strength to tear it open.

And oh! what a heart-breaking letter it was,—heart-breaking from kindness, goodness, gentleness, generosity;—one of those letters that women only can write,—one of those letters that women only can feel,—uncalculating, tender, noble,—flowing from the heart without the smallest interposition of the head.

In the angelic nature of such a woman as Harriet Brookes, let the white wings lie folded, compact, and undreamed of, as they may, the moment occasion requires it, the silver plumes expand, and we know that we

stand in presence of a being of a higher sphere.

My betrothed made no protestations that she had not entertained the intention of accepting Lord Donnington's proposals ; but treated such a breach of faith as a thing too impossible to require denial. Of the worldly advantages on which I had insisted so largely and so vulgarly, she said not a syllable. Her only allusion to the consequence of Lord Donnington, was by indirectly making it a pedestal to raise me in my own estimation.

The few lines I had seen in her handwriting addressed to Barty, contained a simple request that he would decline the proposals of Lord D., whom both aunt and niece had referred to *him*, in order to spare themselves a fruitless renewal of importunity ; — and I had only the want of generosity of one who, in many things, showed

himself ungenerous, to thank for all the anguish I had been undergoing.

Still, my friend Brookes probably persuaded himself that, in spite of all, the Donnington match would come off at last. His peculiar mode of saying, for weeks afterwards, whenever Suffolk was alluded to —

“Were I rich, poor Harriet should follow her own inclinations. Were I in Robert’s place, my sister should not be forced to make a *mariage de raison*, in order to secure herself a home—” convinced me that he was satisfied she would end her days at Donnington Castle.

Barty was one of little faith in feminine virtues. I have often observed this failing in men who never knew the happiness of a mother’s care; and want of reverence towards the sex is as much a grace the less in a human character, as the want of loyalty in an American’s.—The loss of eyesight is, in my opinion, scarcely a greater disfigurement. In spite of Mrs. Stanley’s fatal devotion to him,

he persisted in treating her attachment as a feminine caprice; and jealousy of Lord James, who entertained the undisguised project of becoming his rival, was, I verily believe, the only thing that prevented his ingratitude from breaking bounds.

One day, I literally surprised myself, in the act of pleading her cause to him! For, rejoiced as I should have been to know the intimacy at an end, I dreaded the results of such harshness as he was beginning to betray. Harassed by remorse and shrinking from the eye of her husband, I dreaded lest unkindness from *him* should stimulate poor Mrs. Stanley to some *coup de tête*, fatal to the happiness of all parties.

“Brookes is such a thorough dog-in-the manger!” observed Lord James one day, with his usual supercilious impertinence. “He will neither eat his slice of pineapple, nor send it away. After allowing days and days to pass without showing so much as the heel

of his boot at Datchet, he looks Malay kreeses at me on finding me installed in a corner of Mrs. Stanley's sofa; earning her endurance of my company by merely satisfying her that our friend Barty has been on duty, or going where glory waited him, to the Chertsey cricket-match."

"I wish you would contrive to make her careless of his glory, and comings, and goings!" said I, anxiously; "no good can possibly come of their *liaison*!—"

"You think her chance would be mended, then, by attaching herself to *me*?" demanded his lordship, drawing up his shirt collar with a smile, for which, had I been poor Ethel's kinsman, I must have brained him on the spot. "Perhaps you are right! Were the worst to come to the worst, *our* elopement would create little surprise. We are an eloping family. My grandmother, you know, was the divorced Lady Deckenham; and my uncle Arthur carried off the young Marchioness

of Cornwall, the prettiest woman of the regency ! People would only shrug their shoulders,—say it was in the blood,—and trust the jury would prove merciful ;—whereas such things are less easily forgiven to the younger brother of a country baronet, never heard of half a mile from his lodge gate.”

CHAPTER VII.

Woe!—I see the wild wind wreak
Its wrath upon thy gentle bloom;
Winter plough thy rounded cheek,
Cloud and darkness close in gloom,
Blackening over and for ever
Youth's serene and silver river.
Love alike and beauty o'er—
Lonely and belov'd no more.

Sir E. BULWER LYTTON'S

translation from SCHILLER.

I am free to confess that dear Harriet's decided rejection of Lord Donnington added a cubit to my stature!—What I felt on the occasion it would be difficult to describe. It was a *bien être* like that of a person under the influence of opium; an exultation like that of a general who, after labouring under an imputa-

tion of cowardice, unexpectedly wins a battle. I began to amuse myself like the rest of my brother officers. Instead of moping away my days in the Belvedere Shrubbery, I accepted a day's shooting whenever or wherever I could get it; and but that the season was now too far advanced for rowing or cricket, should have belonged to all their matches. Archery, however, was just then the fashion,—a capital thing to bring a country neighbourhood together, and promote the consumption of young ladies, ham, chicken, and champagne.

By entering with apparent gusto into such diversions, I was in hopes of averting the suspicions of Barty. For Harriet had distinctly apprised me that I had nothing but opposition to expect at his hands.

“He would consider it as much an act of friendship towards *you* as of justice towards myself,” wrote she, “to put an end to all acquaintance between us.”

But, in trying to diminish his suspicions, I

contracted others of my own.—The motive that attracted Barty to Chertsey and other gay haunts of the neighbourhood, was unmistakeable. An heiress, who was pronounced to be *for* an heiress a charming girl, was the presiding divinity of all these parties; from residing with a quizzical uncle and aunt on the borders of Bagshot Heath.

The first thing I saw of these people was their house, and frightful enough it was! White, square, and isolated as a milestone, there was not a tree on the newly-enclosed land surrounding it, higher than the furze which had been pared and burned, to make way for the new plantations. The mansion stared out at you with all its windows, as far as it could see.

“A retired haberdasher, for a thousand!” cried Lord James, when, as we were driving home from Egham races on the top of a drag, we met the immodest stare of Larch Lodge.

But we two were the only men in the regi-

ment who did not know better; and we were readily informed that old Juckeson was a man who had made a prodigious fortune in the Spice Islands; and ambitious, like most low-born men, of creating a family, had expended certain of his hundreds of thousands in the purchase of a wife having an aristocratic name, but neither beauty, merit, nor consequence. But Mrs. Juckeson, though she gave herself prodigious airs, gave none to her husband; and thus disappointed in his hopes, the old gentleman became disgusted with the fine places he had purchased of spendthrift lords in counties, where, having no root in the soil, he found his insignificance vexatiously manifest; and having built a house on ground so new that he was certain of not being twitted with the superior consequence of his predecessors, he adopted a girl whom he called his niece, and who was supposed to be his natural daughter, to inherit the millions produced (like the jolly red nose

in the song) by “ nutmegs and ginger, cinnamon and cloves.”

Niece, daughter, or ward, Sabina Juckeson was a very striking girl :—millions of degrees inferior in attraction to my gentle Harriet, or even to the soft and sensitive Ethel Stanley, but calculated by her bright complexion and sparkling countenance, her skill as a horse-woman when clearing hedge and ditch with the buck-hounds, and her musical talents, which were of the first order, to turn the heads of every man bearing a commission, whether cavalry or infantry, or arrayed in red coat or blue, from the barracks at Hounslow to those of Clewer !—Aware that the merits of the heiress would extenuate the faults of the woman, the fair Sabina cared little what she said or did, or rather what others thought of her sayings and doings ; and because certain of receiving quarter, gave none in return.

The first thing she heard of Barty Brookes,

after our arrival at Windsor, was, that he was devotedly attached to Mrs. Stanley. That he was a pre-engaged man, sufficed to pique her vanity to effect a conquest. An arrant coquette, the heiress of Larch Lodge, possessing no heart of her own, had little faith in the existence of so useless an appendage; fancying that the feelings of others, like her own, were merely assumed for show, like a pair of ear-rings or a breast-pin. All that was spontaneous in her nature was sarcasm. She laughed at everything and everybody. The favourite objects of her pleasantry were her uncle and aunt. But sooner than want a subject for ridicule, I have heard her laugh at her very self.

“Do not flatter yourself,” said she to Barty, one day in my presence, soon after I made her acquaintance, as we were all walking together on the terrace at Windsor, while the old gentleman executed in the town some commissions for his wife, “do not flatter

yourself, Mr. Brookes, that you will ever attain the front row, letter A, at Larch Lodge. Our family prepossessions are regulated by the strictest order of precedence. We love Lord James, because he is the son of a duke. We like your friend here (pointing to me), because he is an honourable. As to *you*, sir, who are but the brother of a baronet, and ‘last and least in our dear love,’ the illustrious house of Juckeson hesitates to open its arms, or wings, to enfold you.”

Barty laughed heartily. He knew that Sabina cared as little for the hereditary distinctions in which she was deficient, as I for those which, unsupported by the gifts of fortune, were rather an embarrassment than otherwise.

“But even Lord James’s right divine to help the turbot at my aunt’s right hand, is nearly at an end,” continued the gay Sabina; “for Lord Hedsor, of the Life Guards, has announced his intention of paying us a visit,

and his superior precedence insures superior favour."

"Hedsor is the most unlicked cub in the kingdom!" cried Barty, with an air of disgust. "Are you acquainted with him?"

"With all that the peerage can tell—sufficient for the lord-craving appetites of Larch Lodge!"—

"How passing strange," said I, in pity to Barty's evident irritation, "that Mr. Juckeson, whose life has been spent in the colonies, out of reach of the flourish of courtly trumpets, should lay such enormous stress on mere distinctions of rank!"

"The very reason! My uncle magnifies the consequence of lords, as *I* do that of angels, as the more to be venerated for being invisible. But I do nothing to cure his disorder. Like the pomps and vanities of our ostentatious household, it is the safety-valve that emits a thousand ill-humours. People may laugh at our gilt staircase and

waggon-loads of plate ; but think what it would be, were such a love of the gorgeous as my uncle's, thrown into the system ! He would become bitter and bilious as a minister out of place ; instead of being a good-natured, hospitable old gentleman, throwing his champagne and burgundy at everybody's head."

There was a sprinkling of good sense in Miss Juckeson's impertinence, which, as a stranger, rather amused me. But I foresaw that, with such shrewd perceptions, the suit of an heiress-hunter must fall to the ground.

It was almost a comfort to be able to reply to Mrs. Stanley, when, with quivering lips, and eyes glittering with tears, she inquired concerning the personal charms of the heiress, who appeared to engross the whole attention of Barty—

"A handsome girl, certainly ;—but the last in the world to touch the heart of a man of feeling."—

How well I remember the sunny smile with which she requited the intelligence!—Poor soul! *Her* heart was only too deeply touched. —All the commiseration I could spare to any sorrows but my own I was beginning to accord her. Earnestly as I had desired, in the first instance, to moderate her intimacy with Barty, my interposition had come so much too late, that there was as much to deplore in his sudden relinquishment of her society, as in his previous assiduities. The mischief was done—her domestic peace was destroyed.—Happiness had forsaken her roof; and to the small circle in which she lived, all this was so apparent, that there was some pretext for the coldness with which the more rigidly righteous began to hold aloof from Lisbon House.

Nor was the misery of the case confined to poor Mrs. Stanley. Never did I feel more shocked than on noticing, when paying a morning visit at Datchet, towards the beginning

of winter, the change which a few short months had wrought in the place. The cheerfulness produced in even the dullest of country houses by the brightness of summer flowers and verdure perceived through the open doors and windows, is usually replaced by the genial glow of a crackling fire, and the snugness arising from winter furniture and occupations. But under poor Stanley's roof, the clinging fog without, did not strike one as half so chilly and comfortless, as the despondency within. The piano was closed, as though it had been never open. A pile of new books lay uncut on the table. The work-box was shut. The very pillows of the sofa were undisturbed, and the fire burnt lazily in the cedar parlour, into which I was shown, as though it were habitually uninhabited.

While awaiting there the appearance of Mrs. Stanley, the deadness of the atmosphere struck to my heart. The flowerless parterres of the garden, the little fountain, that used

to glisten in the sunshine, now frost-bound and silent, were not more characteristic of the decline of the year, than that disenchanted chamber of the broken spirits of its mistress.

After a delay of ten minutes, down came a sour-looking lady's maid, to say that Mrs. Stanley, who was not very well, "hoped I would excuse her." And on my begging that I might not put her to the slightest inconvenience, and saying I would call some other time, the impertinent smile of the *soubrette* plainly implied that the ailments of her lady were megrims, scarcely worth my sympathy.

As I was crossing the forecourt towards the iron gates, Robson, the gray-headed butler, respectfully recalled me.

"Mr. Stanley was at home. His master would be glad to see me in the library."

Those last few words have always a disagreeable association for my ear; as the

phrase by which, when a boy, I used to be summoned into the presence of a severe grandfather, to be reprimanded for my childish faults. I entered that of Mr. Stanley, accordingly, with something of the sensations of a culprit.

No sooner in the library, than I heartily wished myself out of it. The old gentleman was far more grievously changed than the cedar parlour. His voice had become so feeble, his words so meek, his complexion was so unnaturally wan, and the ears stood out so prominently from his meager head, that I saw in a moment he had made one of those rapid strides towards the grave which are never retraced by the foot of age.

The irresolute manner in which he kept shifting the papers on the table beside him, after we had taken our seats, betrayed that he was ill at ease. There was something on his mind which he evidently knew not how to bring out.

We talked over the untoward state of the weather, the badness of the season for sportsmen, the absence of several leading families of the neighbourhood. But it could not be to listen to all this, I was summoned back by the butler. On alluding with regret to Mrs. Stanley's health, I fancied I had touched the right chord. Even then, however, his sympathy was demonstrated by a slight cough, and a tinge of red streaking his sallow cheek.

"I have been persuading her to try Brighton," said he. "I am convinced this place does not agree with her. At this season of the year, it is damp and dull."

"And cannot you prevail on her to make the trial?"

Mr. Stanley shook his head.

"Like all invalids, she is averse to exertion. My wife maintains that home is the best place for sick people."

"I cannot fancy her really ill," said I.
"At this time of year, when out-of-door

pleasures are at an end, ladies are apt to find their time in the country hang a little heavy; and want of spirits is often mistaken for want of health."

"Had you seen Mrs. Stanley lately," interrupted my host, "you would perceive that her illness arises from something more than *ennui*.—She is sadly altered, sadly altered! When I remember what she was last spring,—when I"—he paused, as if overcome by some inward struggle of feeling. "But our health and happiness lie at the disposal of a will that is inscrutable!"—added he, with a tremulous lip. "God's will be done!"

"At Mrs. Stanley's age, my dear sir, a few weeks' indisposition make no very alarming impression on the constitution," said I, hoping to comfort him. "When the spring breaks again, you will see her become as strong and brilliant as ever."

Again the gray head was impressively shaken.

"When the spring breaks," said he, "it

will come too late, unless her friends second my endeavours to restore her to herself. We must all try to enliven her. It is a long time since you paid us a visit. It is a long time since Mr. Brookes paid us a visit. You must bring him here with you some morning—the sooner the better.”

The murder was out. The deadly paleness which converted Mr. Stanley's head into the semblance of a marble bust the moment the words were out of his mouth, convinced me of the effort it had cost him to propose what he probably regarded as the only means of saving the life, or reason, of his unhappy wife. And touching indeed was his forbearance towards that young creature, whom he “pitied, even as a father pitieth his own children.”

Unwilling to mislead him by false expectations, I told him I would deliver his invitation to my friend; but that my present visit was one of adieu.—“I was about to spend my Christmas in Suffolk.”

Right difficult I found it, when thus alluding to my approaching happiness, to subdue my voice and manner so as not to wound the feelings of one to whom the aspect of joy was beginning to be painful.

“On my return to Windsor,” said I, on rising to take leave, “I trust to find your anxiety relieved.”

“Shall you be long absent?”—said he, extending his hand.

“My leave expires in February. By that time, no doubt, Mrs. Stanley will be completely restored to health.”

He did not say a word. A pressure of the hand was his silent token of farewell. But never did I see a human countenance more expressive of misery than his, when endeavouring to assume a kindly smile as I quitted the room.

It was difficult for me at that moment to find compassion for any human being. The supreme happiness of seeing my Harriet

again, after a year's separation, seemed to invest the whole earth with sunshine. Nevertheless, as I made my way back to Windsor, it was impossible not to feel deeply for the man whose declining years had been thus wantonly blighted for ever.

Unblinded, however, by the uxorious weakness of poor Stanley, I experienced little sympathy in the illness of his wife. My faith in the sensibility of flirting married women, was not such as to inspire me with serious apprehensions on her account. I thought her far more likely to recover her health and spirits, if left to herself and her indulgent husband, than by renewing the visits of one who had ceased to love, and had never respected her.

At all events, so certain was I that Brookes himself would derive no benefit from a renewal of the intimacy, that I determined to leave Mr. Stanley's commission unexecuted. It was more than probable he might not

find courage or means to renew the invitation.

And now, gentle reader, if you have humanity enough in your heart to find pleasure in the sight of perfect happiness—a spectacle which, from the days of Milton's Satan, has been held a sore trial to the evil-minded,—be pleased to accompany me in my visit to Mandevale Park. Yet I have some scruple in making the request. On paper, lovers have always appeared to me as tedious as a law-deed; and even Lovelace and St. Preux might be abridged, with advantage, of half their ecstasies.

But in ecstasies, neither Harriet nor myself were of a nature to indulge. Feverish as was the excitement of my mind during every mile of the journey, no sooner was I in her presence, than I felt subdued into that peaceful, happy consciousness of joy, which beings of a superior order invariably inspire.

The first words addressed to me by Lord

Mandevale were, however, dispiriting enough. "Welcome, a thousand welcomes, my dear Percy!" cried he. "We've got a famous party waiting for you, and expect to have twice as merry doings as last year. Lady Mandevale has a project for getting up some French plays: and we are to have the Dauntsons and Trevors, next week.—I'd half a mind, by the way, to write and ask young Brookes to accompany you, who is said to be a first-rate hand at that sort of thing.—But, as we do not see quite so much as we used of the family at Oak Hill, I thought it might create embarrassment."

"Is there any coldness, then, between Lady Mandevale and the Brookeses?" said I.

"Why, between ourselves, *a little*!—Poor Donnington, you know, is a near kinsman of my wife. And we do not consider that he was handsomely used."

"Lord Donnington?"—said I, luckily recollecting in time that I had no business to know anything about the matter.

“ He proposed, you know, to Miss Brookes—oh! I forgot—it was some time after you were here last year. Well! he *did* propose, as I said before; and, considering that Harriet has nothing, or next to nothing, it would have been a great match for her.—*She* did not think so.—There is no accounting for tastes; and, between ourselves, I sometimes fear she has set her mind upon that great lubberly fellow, William Dauntson—at least he is the only man to whom I ever saw her give encouragement.—At all events, she refused poor Donnington; and in anything but a gracious manner.”

“ Which Lady Mandevale resents !”

“ No—not exactly *that*. A woman has a right of choice; and does a kinder thing by refusing a man she doesn’t like, than by making him a repining wife. But what vexed us was that her brother kept encouraging and holding out hopes to the poor fellow, so that

when Harriet spoke out firmly, the blow almost drove him out of his senses."

"But surely you ought to visit this upon Barty, rather than upon Oak Hill?"

"Oh! the coldness is quite as much on their side as ours. Perhaps they are tired of us, or perhaps they are afraid of meeting Donnington.—But they come here so much less than they used, that Lady Mandevale has almost ceased to trouble them with invitations."

This was a bad beginning; but, having observed to my good-natured host that, as Lord Donnington was no cousin of mine, he must not take it amiss if I renewed my acquaintance on the morrow with the family of my friend Barty—"Of course not—of course not!" cried he. "On the contrary, you must try to enlist Harriet for our private theatricals. Perhaps now you are come, (who were always so great a favourite of the old lady!) you

may contrive to persuade her to be more sociable."

Of course I promised ; and, according to my announcement, lost not a moment the following day in executing my commission. Before the breakfast was quite removed, away I went, like "an arrow from a Tartar's bow," to Oak Hill!

And, oh ! the delight of that winter's walk !

"The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields,"

arrayed in their vernal pride, may afford the fairest aspect of nature. But, in my heart of hearts, I own I prefer a winter landscape. A vast expanse of snow — a lake sheeted with ice—a forest, whose rimy boughs appeared enwrought in silver coral, possess a thousand charms for one whose first and only passion is associated with leafless trees, skaits, sledges, and snowballs !—I found the fireside at Oak Hill warm and cozy as ever ; and as the old lady entertained as little suspicion as her neighbour at the Park of the

real motive of her niece's refusal of Lord Donnington, she received me with open arms, as the friend of the graceless but favourite nephew, who took care that her arms should never close around himself. By Harriet I was welcomed with less demonstration; but when I saw her pass her hands over her eyes, as she bent over her work-box during the loquacious inquiries of Mrs. Brookes concerning the pursuits and avocations of Barty, I was satisfied!

Never weary of hearing all I found it prudent to relate, the old lady chose to call in the old servant who had tended the childhood of her nephews and niece; and who, like other old nurses, persisted in calling her charge "Master Barty," and the visitor announced to her as his brother officer, as "Captain."

But though careful to talk to *them* only of his progress in his regiment, and popularity in the neighbourhood of Windsor, it grieved me sorely that I could not confide to my dear

Harriet my uneasiness concerning her brother. Had she been wholly mine, I should have persuaded her to exercise her better influence over his heart, and make him sensible of the enormity of sacrificing the whole happiness of a life, nay, of many lives, merely that a rainy day might hang less heavily on his hands. His sister would have agreed with *me*, that Emmy's conduct towards him did not justify such random vengeance against the sex.

But of the peculiar cause of estrangement between Barty and his sister-in-law, nothing was known at Oak Hill. In the course of the summer Harriet and her aunt had paid a visit to Wrenhurst, and received the most favourable impression of the domestic happiness of Sir Robert and Lady Brookes. Their children were beautiful. Their establishment was arranged with a degree of comfort and order that would have done honour (the approving aunt observed,) to older heads;

and, by prudent management, the baronet had made considerable additions to his paternal estate. After hearing all which, it was impossible not to feel that, however blameable her want of candour, the Wandsworth romp had ample justification for her change of mind.

Notwithstanding my deep interest in every possible detail concerning the family which was to be eventually my own, the reader will conceive that it must have been a little tantalizing to sit watching the speaking countenance of one's plighted love; varying, from the paleness produced by deep emotion at one's entrance, to the most vivid tints and sparkling smiles. It was like witnessing a sunrise from some Alpine height. Before I had been half an hour in the room, her beautiful face acquired a thousand charms; for no toilet that coquetry and cosmetics ever devised is half so great a beautifier to a woman, as the presence of the man she loves.

I tried not to fix my eyes *too* fondly on her. I endeavoured to *seem* to listen while the old lady was acquainting me with the admirable arrangements of her nephew's model farm. I did my best to forget that the graceful girl beside me, whose voice murmured like music in my ears and whose breath almost reached my cheek, was my own—my plighted wife,—who had renounced for my sake all with which rank and fortune entrance the vanity of her sex.

But never shall I forget the commotion in my heart when old Nanny made her re-appearance, with a lamentable appeal to the ladies in favour of a child belonging to a numerous family in the village, who, having met with a bad accident, was brought by its mother for their advice.

I could have killed Harriet for the zeal with which she started up, and volunteered her assistance. But, in matters of the medicine-chest the old lady was luckily jealous

of her prerogative; and, after a thousand apologies about leaving me alone, (to which I replied by professing myself on the point of departure, and declaring that I would wait only till I heard her opinion of the poor little boy,) she assured Harriet, exactly as I expected, that *her* assistance in the case was superfluous.

Away she went; and Nanny closed the door, and we were at length — (*at length!*) alone!—

CHAPTER VIII.

Even when alone together, looks, no utterance can define,
Mark'd now and then soul-wanderings, that proved her
half divine :

High treasure, ten times treasur'd, for not seeming wholly
mine.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

The news I had to learn from Harriet, in return for my protestations of grateful affection, were far from consolatory. The visit to Wrenhurst had been devised by her anxious aunt for the purpose of enlisting the heads of the family in the cause of Lord Donnington ; and all that fraternal prudence could suggest was urged by Sir Robert in the way of warning and remonstrance.

Every relation—every friend she possessed

in the world, in short, was leagued against me. But, with that delicious obstinacy of her sex which, when practised by our own, we dignify with the name of firmness, the more they set before her the glories of Donnington Castle and the merits of its master, the more she steeled her heart against them all !—

It would be late in the day of this gray-haired, decrepid, mossy, fossil old world, to attempt an analysis of the nature of love. But it does not remain a less incomprehensible thing to those who come into it green and young, that a feeling should arise between two persons, often at first sight, often in defiance of an utter incompatibility of circumstances, age, habits, and opinions, often without a single pretext or argument in its favour,—yet so potent in its influence as to enable them to triumph over time and tide, and human pride and human vanity, which are stronger than both.

And how thoroughly does this overweening sentiment suffice for the happiness of the unhappy! The same Providence which has enriched with precious gums and exquisite flowers the most torrid and pestilential climes, seems to have taken pleasure in adorning the barren waste of life with a charm that angels might envy.

Forgive me, kind reader. I will not rhapsodize again! But admit that some indulgence is due to the enthusiasm of a young soldier, re-united after a year's absence to a lovely girl whose fidelity has defied the influence of both reason and authority, and preferred an ensign's shako to the pearly coronet of a peer!—

After that day, I had little difficulty in smoothing matters between Mandevale and Oak Hill. They stood too much in need of each other to be irreconcilable. The first inquiry of every guest at the Park was after that charming Miss Brookes, so much the

more "charming" for being unknown to the hackneyed haunts of London, Brighton, and Cowes. Harriet was a person incapable of wounding the self-love of any human being, (except poor Lord Donnington!) and she was consequently a general favourite. There was something almost maternal in Lady Mandevale's mode of kissing her on the forehead, by way of welcome back, the first time the Brookeses joined our dinner party.

But, though I could discern a degree of affectionate reproach in her smile, all hope in her kinsman's favour was evidently not extinct.

Thenceforward we met daily; and what so free from suspicion as the tête-à-têtes one contrives for oneself in the midst of a large party in a country house! The experience of the preceding Christmas had rendered me *au fait* to all the advantages of my position. I knew the exact position of doors and windows at Mandevale; and could calculate as

accurately as Sir Isambart Brunel from which of the sofas in the drawing-room the conservatory was imperceptible, and what turns of the shrubbery were safe from being overlooked by the house. I managed it so expertly, that, though abiding in the same drawing-room, not once in the course of the evening did the old lady at the whist-table obtain a glimpse of her niece.

The grand question of our discussions was whether or not to throw ourselves on the mercy of Mrs. Brookes. Harriet complained sadly of the misery and shame of duplicity towards one to whose kindness she was so deeply indebted ; and, with the generous confidence of her sex, relied sufficiently on the influence of affection to plead her cause with her excellent kinswoman, who would be displeased, doubtless, and resentful for a while, but yield in time to the memory of the wretchedness to which her own life had been condemned by an ill-fated attachment. Less

expansive and less confident in my nature, *I* thought otherwise; and, dreading the issue of some fatal interdiction that would terminate all intercourse between us, implored her to preserve our secret for the present.

The sequel proved that she was right. Alas! women are the only interpreters of the hearts of their own sex!

Meanwhile, the disappointment experienced by the Mandevales in matchmaking, in the case of Harriet and Lord Donnington, had not disgusted them with the vocation. A Christmas party in a country-house would, in fact, fall flat, unless a little of that sort of thing were going on. And as they could not, without treachery to their kinsman, exercise their skill in favour of Miss Brookes, they unluckily selected myself as the victim of their matrimonial machinations.

Among their guests was a rich widow—really a charming person,—a person with whom it pleased me to see my Harriet asso-

ciate, and I need say no more in her favour. But as they *did* from preference associate, and I was naturally a third party in the group, it followed that those who judged me incapable of underhand attentions to her whom they had marked out for Lady Donnington, attributed my assiduities to a secret passion for Lady Georgiana Trench.

What a treasure-trove was such a conceit to my friend Mandevale! From the moment the notion entered his head, he could scarcely rest in his bed for the delight of anticipating a match made up under his roof. For many years, no such catastrophe had been heard of. It was not a marrying neighbourhood; and I sometimes thought he felt ashamed of having so near his gates as Oak Hill a couple of spinsters, for whom he was unable to provide appropriate mates.

But by marrying me—me, a poor lieutenant in the Guards, the younger brother of a needy Irish peer, to a widow with a clear

four thousand per annum and one of the prettiest places in the county, he should rub off all his disgraces. The obloquy thrown on his honour would be redeemed.

His lordship's manœuvres to place us together every day at dinner, and every morning in the droschky, soon became insupportable. But that Lady Georgiana was a clear-sighted, well-bred woman, she would, perhaps, have attributed to *me* connivance in the interested projects of our friend ; and though no mouther of fine phrases, it cost me as much eloquence in arraignment of the baseness of fortune-hunting, and the misery of unequal matches, as might have set up a score or two of writing-masters' copies, in order to make her comprehend that I was above taking part in Lord Mandevale's nefarious designs.

But though eager to set her right on that score, I could not (to the Mandevales and the rest of the party,) signalize as strongly as I wished the indifference of my feelings

towards Lady Georgiana; lest they might surmise that a man of my age could scarcely live on so intimate a footing with so charming a woman, unmoved by her attractions, unless guarded by the pre-engagement of his heart.

What she herself thought on the subject, I will not pretend to decide. I suspect that, as is often the case with women who have lived in the world, and tasted of the fruit of good and evil, she considered Harriet too *borné* to exercise much influence. By nature an enthusiast—an enthusiast who wrote charming verses, and painted in oils,—the eternal stitchery of Oak Hill appeared to Lady Georgiana mere waste of time, and the evidence of a limited capacity; nor could she refrain from endeavouring to incite the taste of her young friend towards higher ambitions, and pursuits more intellectual and refined.

But it might not be. The gentle temper and well-regulated spirit of my Harriet were

not to be disturbed from their serenity. Lady Georgiana might have as well attempted to endow the swan with the instincts of the eagle, or produce the foam and sparkle of a cataract in some level stream ! Harriet was essentially a home-staying, heart-comforting, trouble-assuaging woman, born to create and enjoy a quiet household. The cultivation of her own mind for self-enjoyment, she would have regarded as an indulgence almost criminal. The tumultuous passions and high-soaring sentiments described by the accomplished widow as the ennobling atmosphere of genius and heroism, appeared to her as ideal as the visions of an alchymist ; and after sundry infructuous endeavours to elevate the aspirations of one who smiled so like an angel, and yet was of the earth, earthy, Lady Georgiana left her to herself.

The enthusiast did not perceive that, while *her* spirit was soaring into the clouds, the pure mind of Harriet had attained still higher

elevation, and was safe in the Heaven of heavens !—

“ You must help us to make up a marriage, my dear Hatty, between our friend, poor Percy, here, and the pretty widow,” said Lord Mandevale, who had resumed all his former fatherly familiarity with Miss Brookes, partly from the kindliness of his own nature, and partly from the conciliation of hers. “ They will make charming neighbours for us, if we can get them to marry and settle at The Danes. Lady Georgy’s present whimwhams about summering in Switzerland and wintering in Italy, would soon give place to good, sober, English roast-mutton ideas of domestic life, if she had only an attached, steady, agreeable husband, like Percy, to keep her company at home.”

We both smiled ; that is, we both tried to smile. Nay, we really accomplished the difficult feat, when his lordship set to work, with all his arithmetic, to calculate the num-

ber of acres Lady Georgiana was possessed of, and the value per acre of her land, as an inducement to me to sit by her at dinner, and suffer myself to be beat by her at billiards.

“ You can’t deny that she is a sweet pretty creature, Percy ?” cried he, in the warmth of his zeal. “ Bless you ! in poor Trench’s time, scarcely a man in the county but was in love with her. Poor Trench was sometimes half out of his wits for jealousy ! But she’s sown her wild oats *now*. She’s quiet enough *now*. She’s found out the real purposes of life *now* ; and with her handsome fortune, and the good connections of both (to say nothing of agreeableness and popularity), you’d have the pleasantest house in the county. And I’ll tell you what, Percy, my boy !—If you and I were to unite in preserving the game at Braseley and Missenden, there wouldn’t be such pheasant-shooting in England !”

I was half inclined to humour his weak-

ness, by way of throwing dust in his eyes. But I knew I should lower myself in those of Harriet, by even the smallest attempt at deception.

I soon grew frightened, however, lest Lady Georgiana, instead of having *her* eyes blinded, should see straight into the truth of the case; for there is nothing like wounded vanity for quickening a woman's perceptions in such matters.

The fair widow, for instance, was a tremendous musician. I use the word "tremendous" advisedly; for such sublime execution as hers always inspires me with awe—awe, too, unmixed with any pleasanter sensation. Her natural talents had been perfected in the course of those foreign wild flyings, so much objected to by Lord Mandevale; and during a winter at Vienna, she had acquired the mastery of Beethoven's counterpoint, and learned to dash through the rhapsodies of Liszt and Thalberg, as though

possessing as many hands as Briareus. A squadron of Prussian dragoons galloping up and down the piano, would not have produced greater execution.

Even vocal music she contrived to render disagreeable, per force of perfection. The scale of Lady Georgiana's voice enabled her to take the part of Donna Anna in *Don Juan*, or the *Königinn von Nacht* in the *Zauberflöte*; and whenever any supremely difficult and frightful bravura was inflicted on the musical world, she was sure to get it by heart, and astonish even orchestras and professors.

Such exhibitions in private life ought, in my opinion, to be put down by act of parliament! Not one person in two hundred but finds them insupportable; and when Lady Georgiana, led away by her wild enthusiasm, was indulging in her vocal or instrumental skirmishings, the country gentlemen used to look absolutely panic-struck.

To bear it with more than submission, was out of my power. And I admit that I often seized the opportunity afforded by the *fortissimo* in her concertos, or the *point d'orgue* upon an upper F, in her bravuras, to steal out of the room on pretence of consulting the weather-glass that hung in the vestibule adjoining the music-room.

She saw me, of course; for movements of that kind are never overlooked by the person who is singing. Liszt left off playing at the royal concert at Bröhl, because the Queen of England was seen to whisper. Lady Georgiana did not follow his example—I wish she *had*! But it did not escape her that I sat breathless and entranced whenever Miss Brookes, who knew nothing of music except how to make it agreeable, acceded to Lady Mandevale's request for a ballad;—some old thing she had learned by ear from her aunt, or old nurse,—or the simple strain of some old-fashioned poet, which she had adapted to

a melody of her own, and sang with a voice as small and sweet as a shepherd's pipe.

She was not fond of singing before strangers. But the Mandevales were not to be refused. And as, during my visits to Oak Hill, however long and frequent, I found it pleasanter to listen to talking "far above singing," than to singing sweeter than any other kind of music, I could never manage to look otherwise than enraptured while listening at the Hall to those pure and simple notes which I never heard elsewhere.

One night, I overheard Lady Georgiana, in the blindness of her vanity, propose to give Miss Brookes some lessons in music, to enable her to accompany herself in a more scientific manner; and the country schoolmaster's offer to Charles Lamb to teach him how to write an essay, occurring to me at the moment, an involuntary smile betrayed what was passing in my mind.

"I see now why Lord Donnington was re-

fused!" whispered she to Harriet, as soon afterwards they took their candles at the same moment to retire to bed; "and why our friend of the Coldstream finds Mandevale Park so much pleasanter, every Christmas, than the Halls and Castles belonging to his numerous uncles and cousins. But do not be afraid, my dear! I am not going to peach!—I am not going to turn aunt's evidence!"—continued she, on perceiving her little friend turn as pale as death, when at that moment Mrs. Brookes approached them. "You deserve it, though, Harriet, for being so close with me. When you saw me fall in love with you at first sight, and open my heart, as wide as if it contained anything worth showing, you ought to have given me a hint of the truth."

"I assure you"—Harriet was beginning.

"No, don't assure me!" interrupted Lady Georgiana, "for when you assume that demure face, I do not believe a syllable that comes out of your mouth. But thank your

stars, little hypocrite, that you are let off so easily! Do you remember Turenne's declaration to the young officer who had attempted to try his courage by a false alarm? — 'Had you convicted me of cowardice, young man, I would have killed you on the spot!'— Believe me, if I had been betrayed into a liking for this very likeable Percy of yours— (a thing by no means unlikely—for the Mandevales have been wooing me in his behalf ever since I arrived here,) never would I have forgiven you!—Luckily the ball has only grazed the skin, and I can afford to be merciful!"

Merciful, she was. For the following day, she spoke to me on the subject even more explicitly than she had done to Harriet; and as I had the grace to plead guilty at once to the soft impeachment of being desperately in love, a warm auxiliary was enlisted in our cause.

"We fairies never injure men
Who dare to tell us true!"

quoted the lovely widow, by way of rejoinder to my confidences. "Thank you for having trusted to my magnanimity. A blockhead, like my cousin Lord James, (a brother officer of yours, is he not?) would have fancied he was wounding my vanity. Whereas your frank avowal of an attachment to Miss Brookes has healed the previous wound. But for *that*, your wry faces when I was singing and playing for your amusement, had been vastly impertinent! But men in love are privileged to be deaf, blind, and absent; and a host of minor offences, on your part, are pardoned in favour of your disorder."

She was as good as her word in keeping our secret—nay, better. For she gave us the best advice, and promised all the aid that was compatible with her desire not to offend such kind friends as our host and hostess, by overthrowing the hopes of their kinsman.

But, like dear Harriet, she insisted on the wisdom of candour. As she truly observed,

no one could compel Miss Brookes either to marry Lord Donnington, or break with me. She was of an age to exercise her own judgment and veto.

“Do not shrink from a fair examination of the state of the case,” persisted Lady Georgiana, “or deceive yourselves by building castles in the air. Harriet Brookes, who does not, like your humble servant, bewilder her brains by reading Hegel and Göethe, has no pretext for being ignorant of the exact number of shillings that are contained in a sovereign, or the exact number of butcher and bakers’ bills that will be contained in a year!”

“Believe me,” said I, “we have looked our prospects steadily in the face—”

“And what are they like?”

“Very like two hundred a-year on Harriet’s side, and three hundred and fifty on mine! Not much more than the rent of a good opera-box!” said I, perceiving that she shrugged her shoulders.

“But you have expectations?—Most people have expectations—”

“A few more hundreds a-year will come to me on the death of my grandmother,

A stepdame and a dowager,
Long withering out a young man's revenue,

though eighty years of age.”

“Yes; I remember Lord Mandevale enumerating the grandmother to me, in his catalogue of your perfections!” cried her ladyship, laughing. “A thousand a-year, then, constitutes the very utmost limits of your hopes?”

“Nearly so. But is it not enough for happiness?—I should sell out of the Guards to realize every guinea in my power to settle upon Harriet. And if Mrs. Brookes would consent to our residing with her at Oak Hill, we should all be the happiest people in the world.”

“Of course, while the honeymoon lasted. But a thousand a-year, with a whole houseful

of little Harriets and Percies, crying for bread and butter.—Well, well! we will talk no more about it, just now,” cried she, perceiving that I was annoyed. “But I have altered my counsels about confiding all to our aunt or appealing to Sir Robert Brookes. Time enough, when you are in possession of the dowager’s jointure. You will *then* be able to look the Brookes’ family a little more dignifiedly in the face.”

“And you literally expect,” said I, “that I should go on contenting myself with a yearly meeting? You fancy I can wait till next Christmas, before I again behold all I value upon earth?”

“I dare say you would both survive it!” retorted the provoking little widow. “But I propose better things for you. Nothing would be easier for you both than a midsummer meeting at The Danes. Leave it to *me*. I will work on the good opinion of the old lady and secure the promise of a visit.

What! even six months' absence too much? Unreasonable wretch!—I have a great mind to leave your affairs to take care of themselves; or perhaps invite Lord Donnington to meet the Brookeses in your place!—”

And, true to her word, I saw her that very evening propose a game of picquet to the little old lady, whom she had hitherto treated like one of the chairs or tables.

But before I had half done thanking her in my heart, my attention was suddenly startled from my own affairs by reading in the day's paper, under cover of which I had taken up my post of observation, an announcement of the decease of “ Harman Stanley, Esq., F.R.S. and F.A.S., of Lisbon House, in the county of Berks, aged 62, deeply regretted by a numerous circle of friends.”

Dead!—Poor Stanley, *dead*!—leaving his beautiful wife, no doubt, sole heiress of his property! What an influence might this

circumstance exercise over the fortunes of Barty!—What a crisis in the life of the favourite brother of my dear Harriet!

How I longed to confide to her all I knew on the subject, and all that I surmised! But I dared not. With her, it was impossible to hint at that which was so lightly treated among my habitual associates.

I was even debarred from inquiring of Barty, as I could have wished, the circumstances of poor Stanley's death, and the circumstances in which it had left his widow. How was I to address him from Mandevale Hall without alluding to his sister?—And alas! to write of Harriet without writing out of the abundance of my heart, was out of the question!—

CHAPTER IX.

Le ridicule cesse où commence le crime.

Ah ! vous croyez, Messieurs, qu'on peut impunément,

Masquant ses vils desseins d'un air de badinage,

Attenter à la paix, au bonheur d'un ménage ?

On se croit léger, on devient criminel.

La mort d'un honnête homme, est un poids éternel.

CASIMIR DELAVIGNE.

When I got back to Windsor, Barty had just started, on leave. Nobody seemed to know exactly whither. His letters were to be forwarded to his agent's.

This was vexatious enough, for I was at once anxious to ascertain the position of his affairs, and whether there were any reasonable encouragement to confide to him the state of my own. As to learning from my brother-

officers what he had been about during my absence, one man could talk of nothing, in answer to my inquiries, but the runs of the buckhounds; another had taken a grudge against his commanding-officer, and found a thousand petty injuries to complain of; stories about drills and parades, concerning which I cared not a straw. Then, there had been amateur theatricals at Windsor, got up for some infirmary; and the old-standing jealousy between the guards and life-guards was strongly illustrated in the criticisms by which the jack-boots were belaboured by our fellows. I had, in short, a hundred bad jokes to laugh at, and a hundred stupid grievances to deplore, before I could be allowed a question in return.

At length, I ventured the name of Lisbon House.

“What! had I not heard of old Stanley’s death? Surely he must have been declining before I went away?—Well, he started off

in a hand gallop, and reached darky before any one heard a word about the matter. Everybody was sorry when he went off. For Stanley was a good old fellow for a book-worm, and gave capital Madeira."

"And his wife?"

"His *widow*?—Oh, his widow," they supposed, "was, like other widows, playing propriety. There was an achievement up, and the house seemed closed. Mrs. Stanley was probably gone elsewhere for change of scene."

My mind misgiving me that her departure and that of Barty might have been simultaneous, I resolved to pursue my further inquiries on the morrow at Datchet. My next question regarded Larch Lodge; and on that point they were better informed. Every mother's son of them could prate of the whereabouts of the heiress!—

"The Juckesons were gone to Brighton. The Juckesons were a sad loss. If old

Juckeson had been on the spot at the time of the garrison theatricals, he would have come down with a twenty-pound note for his box !”

“ And the fair Sabina ?”

“ The fair Sabina had refused Wrottesley, of the Life Guards, and sent to the rightabout Sir Claudius Hogg’s eldest son,—the man with the fine park at Sunning Hill ;—both excellent matches.”

“ Miss Juckeson has perhaps an attachment ?” said I. And the conscious, self-complacent air with which every man present either cast down his eyes, or pulled up his shirt collar, convinced me that each believed himself to be the favoured man.

Thus left in doubt whether the mysterious absence of Barty were attributable to heiress-hunting or widow-consoling, I took care not to mention his name in my first letter to Oak Hill. There was no occasion. I had plenty of other things to write about.

In the first place, I could have filled a

volume with expressions of disgust at the noisy life into which I was forced to re-inaugurate myself, after the tranquil happiness and graceful refinement which had been incapacitating me for my professional duties.

I suppose I shall be called spoony for the confession ; but I own I have always loathed the society of my own sex. Men by themselves, and in numbers, are the greatest beasts on earth. Like trees, they require thinning out from the plantation, to acquire anything like dignity of proportion ; and it is only by associating with women, that the higher qualities of their nature are developed. The earthly particles acquire too much preponderance when fed with nothing but cigars, brandy-and-water, and the unlicensed gossip of bachelorhood.

After a few days — and, above all, a few evenings — at Windsor, I felt that I would have given my right hand to spend a single

hour in listening to the voice of Harriet. Even one of Lady Georgiana's bravuras had been as the music of the spheres, compared with the fifty-times told mess anecdotes to which I was forced to give my attention.

But at the end of those few days, I was so much worse off than before, that even a rubber of whist, with Lady Mandevale for partner (who never revoked less than three times in a deal), would have been a pleasant alternative. Lord James, who had been spending a week with some people near Henley,—one of those ten-spare-bed sort of country-families who fill their house with produceable young men and girls, whenever there is a ball in the neighbourhood, came back to the regiment.

I had long come to an understanding with myself, that he was a disagreeable fellow; a fellow, who, like the monkeys, could not eat his nuts in peace without pelting other people with the shells. But one of the most important branches of military duty is to put

up with the disagreeableness of one's brother-officers ; and, as Lord James's barrack-room adjoined my own, we lived together on a dressing-gown-and-slipper system of intimacy, treating each other, in tones and on terms of friendship, with home-truths, in atonement of which, throats have been cut ere now.

I have sometimes pondered, by the way, whether the boundless freedom of bantering, which is the order of the day, be not the result of the disarmed condition of modern chivalry. When every gentleman wore a sword, people did not hazard what is called by the slang-mongers "taking a rise out of him," as is the practice in these our times, when challenges, like bills of exchange, are drawn at three days' sight.

"So, Percy, my boy !" was his uncere-
monious salutation, the day after his arrival,
"your invariable principles, it seems, have
had a shake ? The protestations about love

in a cottage, with which you have been stunning us for this year past, all end with a long shot at the jointure of my fair cousin, Lady Georgiana Trench!—What a rogue you are to what I am!"

I longed to knock him down. But, as I could have done no worse had his accusation been true, I contained myself.

"May I inquire to whom you are indebted for this interesting intelligence?" said I, with a forced smile.

"To what the newspapers would call 'my own correspondent' in Suffolk."

"Then let me tell you," said I, losing my temper, "that your own correspondent is—"

"Softly, softly," cried he, taking me by the arm, and patting me on the back, as nurses do to prevent a child from choking. "No big words,—no ugly words! For my own correspondent in Suffolk is no other than my cousin Georgy herself."

“And she told you that I was making up to her?”

“Do you suppose a woman ever sits down, in cold blood, to disclose anything of the kind, even to her cousin the Guardsman? No, no!—she contented herself with writing me a letter (headed with, ‘private and confidential,’ the words being underscored till they looked like St. Lawrence’s gridiron, or a map of Kent, marked with the lines of the six opposition south-eastern railways), begging to know your character in the regiment, with a diffuseness of catechization on the subject, such as ladies use only respecting a man whom they are going to engage as coachman, or husband.”

“And how do you know that Lady Georgiana has no thoughts of me in the former capacity?” said I, the moment I perceived that it was her ladyship’s indiscreet zeal for the happiness of her young friend Harriet, which had exposed me to this absurd imputation.

“ Because the little widow is much too fond of keeping the whip in her own hands ! She tormented her late husband into a mad-house,—though I admit that he gave some proof of incipient insanity by choosing her as a wife. However, if The Danes be your only resource against the Bench, and it is either a jointure or the benefit of the Insolvent act, depend upon it you will meet with no opposition from *me* ! I wrote her word that you were honest, sober, and cleanly, and could have an undeniable character from your last place, which you left from having a few words with the lady’s maid.”

“ Thank you.”

“ Don’t look so confoundly affronted ! What better are we than our brethren of the shoulder-knot ?

Les soldats, aujourd’hui, sont des valets de guerre
Qu’on habille en livrée de la couleur du roi.”

“ Did you acquaint Barty Brookes,” said I,—sauntering to the window, and looking

out as earnestly into the barrack-yard as if I had never seen it before—"that Lady Georgiana had written to you for my character?"

"Not I!—Barty had affairs enough of his own upon his hands, without needing to be troubled with yours."

"Before I got my leave, Larch Lodge left him very little leisure," said I.—"For my part, I would as soon be tied to the tail of a meteor, as dance attendance on a finished coquette, like Miss Juckeson."

"*C'est selon!*—When a man is making love to a fortune,—or a jointure,—he must not spare his pains."

"Brookes is gone to Brighton, then, after the Juckesons?"

"How should I know?—*He* does not write me letters marked 'private and confidential,'—or I would tell you.—I suspect however,—mind, I only say *suspect*—that he is gone after nobody—but simply out of somebody's way."

“ Mrs. Stanley ?”

“ *Précisément !*—He probably fears that she may want to make an honest man of him.”

“ If still attached to him, Barty might surely do worse than marry her ?—Old Stanley must have died rich ?”

“ My dear fellow, you are sadly after time ! You must have been changing horses on the road. If you don’t look a little sharper, you’ll be overtaken.”

“ Why can’t you tell me at once,” said I peevishly, “ how matters stand ? Where is the use of making a butt of a man when there is no one by to applaud you ?”

“ True, O king !—It *is* labour lost making fun of you.—You are like a wild goose, hard to bring down, and worth nothing when roasted. However, as I want you to take my duty for me to-morrow, accept the little news I can bestow upon you concerning Lisbon House. The old man left to his widow only the miserable four hundred a year jointure, that he

settled on her at his marriage. The rest of his fortune, about seventy or eighty thousand pounds, I fancy, will go of course to the child."

"What child?—The Stanleys had no children."

"*What* child!—You are still lower in the scale of human intelligence than I supposed you—or your courtship of Georgy must have been more serious. Why, what do you suppose was the cause of old Stanley's death?"

"How should I know?"—cried I, determined not to utter a word that might implicate Barty. "Old age,—an impaired constitution."—

"Fiddlestick! When we first came to Windsor, he was a fine hale old soul, who could have knocked down a beefeater, and might have lived to see fourscore! I tell you he died of nothing more or less than the announcement of Mrs. Stanley's situation."

"Her situation?"—

“ She is to be confined early in the spring.”

“ I see it all now !” cried I,—hoping to prevent a more explicit allusion either to the past or the future.

“ Aware of the impossibility of proving the illegitimacy of the child,—aware that even his wife’s avowal of her conduct would avail him nothing,—aware that, publish his dishonour as he might, nothing could prevent an infant born in wedlock from inheriting the fortune secured by settlement to his heirs,—he did the delinquents the favour of rushing out of the world and placing the bantling in enjoyment of the property the moment it sees the light.”

“ What a tissue of misery and guilt !” burst involuntarily from my lips.

“ Say rather what a tissue of vice and folly !”—cried Lord James,—“ Mrs. Stanley has acted like an idiot. Mrs. Stanley had the game in her hands. If, instead of playing the Magdalen when no one asked her,

and provoking the suspicions of the old gentleman by tearing her hair and weeping her blue eyes out, she had redoubled her attentions to him, Stanley would have become the happiest of men and fathers, instead of dying miserably and leaving her a double burthen of remorse.

Where ignorance is bliss,

'Tis folly to be wise :

but it is more than folly—it is wickedness on the part of those who curse us by enlightenment.”

It was no business of mine to war with his casuistry. My thoughts just then were with the Stanleys.

Next day, the soldier who acted as Barty's servant when he was with the regiment brought me a letter he had received from his master, begging I would have the goodness to decipher for him a few words that had been torn by the seal, relative to a pointer puppy left at some dog-breaker's :—a message of no

interest, and requiring no answer. But what *was* a matter of interest,—to *me* at least,—was that, although no date was affixed to the letter, the postmark was that of a small town on the borders of Yorkshire,—the post town of Wrenhurst!—

Incredible!—Barty, who had so often sworn to me he would never set foot in his brother's house,—Barty, who had for four years past wholly alienated himself from his old home,—to be there, and there as it were, *en cachette*, at a moment when most of his intimates asserted him to be with the Juckesons at Brighton!—

Knowledge thus surreptitiously obtained, I scarcely felt to be honestly my own; and therefore determined that, however I might hear the matter questioned, the place of Barty's retreat should be a secret for *me*. He *must* have some strong motive for such mysterious seclusion.

Meanwhile, common charity, common de-

gency, prompted me to proceed to Datchet, for a formal inquiry after the health of one, whom, in her more prosperous days, I had always found so hospitable.

It was not curiosity, no, by heavens ! it was not vulgar curiosity—I swear it was a better motive that prompted me—after receiving the usual formal answer to my inquiries after the health of Mrs. Stanley,—to ask the gray-headed butler, who was nearly as much altered as his poor master at my former visit, whether Mr. Stanley had suffered much in his last illness, and whether he had been aware of his approaching end.

I spoke in a very low voice, though he had advanced beyond the doorstep to address me, so that it was impossible for any one in the hall to overhear what passed between us. And yet, he kept looking nervously back as he answered me, in broken accents and with tears gathering in his eyes,—that his master had gone off rather suddenly—“ though perhaps

not soon *enough*," added he, in a lower voice; "for he *did* suffer, sir, suffer very bitterly,—though too proud to show it."

"I thought him sadly changed when I called here last," said I. "He commissioned me to send one of my brother-officers to see him. But I scarcely thought him well enough for company."

"Then *that* must have been two months and a fortnight ago, sir," said the old man, musingly; "for it is just two months since we lost him; and for a fortnight before his death, he opened his lips to no one—no, not once after—after the cause of my mistress's illness was known. And I remember, that it was one evening after you had called, and Mrs. Stanley declined seeing you, that my master sent for the doctors to her, and all came out.—But God's will be done!"—

"She is still *here*?" said I, interrupting his nervous whisper into a fear of being overheard.

“ My mistress is here for the present. They want to move her, sir. They fancy she would be better for change of air. In *my* opinion, it would kill her at once. With a trouble such as hers upon the mind, there is nothing like letting a person indulge their grief in their own way. Whenever I see her in tears, poor lady, I am glad, for I know it comforts her.”

“ But Mrs. Stanley has, of course, some one with her,—some relation,—some friend ?”

“ If she had had friends and relations, sir, maybe she would never have *been* Mrs. Stanley !” rejoined old Robson, shaking his head. “ My mistress found no one to befriend her when she was a poor, destitute young lady. How much less now, when she is still poor, and has so many ready to cast a stone at her ! ’Tis my belief, that the great cause of her taking on so terribly (which, in her situation, may have a worse influence than she dreams of), is the feeling herself so deserted, so forgotten, so all alone in the world.”

The tears that now fell unchecked from the old man's shaggy eyelids convinced me that he was talking from his heart; and from the depths of mine came the impulse prompting me to entreat he would take in my card to Mrs. Stanley, inform her that I was come to inquire after her health, and whether I could be of the smallest assistance to her.

"She will not see you, sir. Ten to one, she will not even answer your message."

"Never mind—I shall have eased my conscience by the offer."

I almost feared, from the evident reluctance of the old servant to comply with my request, that he was about to make a feint of acquiescence, and that my message would never reach its destination. During the few minutes I remained awaiting him on the chilly doorsteps, convinced that he had proceeded no further than the oaken passage, I was making up my mind to address the same courtesies to Mrs. Stanley, by letter, on

my return to the barracks; when, lo! just as I had fixed my listless eyes on the golden circle of crocuses, which seemed to shed factitious sunshine on the old-fashioned court, and recalled to mind, by this token of reviving spring, the length of time which had elapsed since I first noticed the saddened aspect of the place, old Robson re-appeared,—his face shining almost as bright as the crocuses.

“ She *will* see you, sir!—My mistress *will* see you! I never should have thought it! After she had paused a minute over your card and message, as if not thoroughly comprehending, she suddenly started up, and bade me fetch you in.”

“ Perhaps it would be as well,” said I, “ if I left her a few minutes’ leisure to recover herself, for the effort of seeing a stranger?”

“ Not by no means in the world, sir!” replied the old man. “ If she thought twice about it, may be she’d change her mind

either thinking folks might talk about the visit, or that she was not equal to the exertion. But well do I remember, sir, the first day as ever you came into this house, how much my poor master was taken with you, and how different he thought you from others, who were greater favourites ; and how grieved he was the day he found out you were going on leave of absence. ‘ Another friend deserting me in my need ! ’ said he, as he undressed that night. ‘ Somehow or other, I felt that young man to be almost a friend ! ’ ”

These touching reminiscences were not exactly calculated to raise my spirits, as a preliminary to the trying interview that awaited me ; and I was almost choked by the pain in my throat, as I made my way on tiptoe, as if poor Stanley were still lying dead in the house, along that gloomy, old corridor. Let the reader despise me as he may, but I swear I had hardly courage to enter the cedar par-

hour, into which I was motioned by the agitated old man.

I expected to hear the sound of sobs—I expected to find Mrs. Stanley in tears—I was prepared for the painful excitement of a *scene*. Yet, though a surprise, it was no relief to my feelings to perceive her seated precisely in her wonted place, as if she had been led there by her attendant, and wanted strength to leave it.

For she had no visible occupation. There were no books near her,—no working or writing materials.—She raised her eyes vacantly from the carpet when I entered; fixed them upon me for a moment, as if trying to understand the purpose of my being there; and then, with the same dull vacuity of countenance, pointed to a vacant chair.

As to tears, she looked as though her eyes were as unsusceptible of that grateful moisture, as the burning sands of the desert of evening dew.

The widow's weeds in which she was attired had evidently been assumed with the same mechanical submission as the seat she was placed in. Poor creature,—poor Ethel !—She had ceased to hope,—she had ceased to *wish*,—except that God would please to shorten her days of probation. Let my readers call to mind the attenuated delicacy of feature of Canova's Magdalen,—the feeble, hopeless, self-abandonment of its countenance and attitude,—and they will see the poor widow quite as clearly as I was able to discern her through my blinding tears.

“ You expressed a wish to see me,” said she, at last, in a voice from which all tone and accent were extracted, so that it was as a voice from the dead.

“ I was desirous of assuring you in person, my dear Mrs. Stanley,” said I, bending towards her, and speaking nearly as low as herself, for she appeared too meek and fragile to be addressed like other people, “ that if it

were in my power to save you any trouble or inconvenience, by officiating on any occasion in your behalf”

She gently raised her feeble hands and clasped them together, while uttering a few inarticulate words, but not as if wishing to interrupt me.

“Believe me,” I therefore resumed, “it would afford me the sincerest satisfaction to be of service or comfort to one in whose situation I so deeply sympathize.”

“Did he send you to me?” said she, in the same half-articulate murmur; and, blockhead that I was, I was on the point of asking to whom she alluded. Another moment, and I understood her.

“I have not seen him these two months—not since I had the pleasure of seeing yourself,” said I, comprehending only too well that she alluded to my friend Brookes.

“I thought, perhaps, you came from *him*!” exclaimed the poor creature, with a look of

ghastly disappointment, which I shall never forget. "I know he ought not to send to me.—I know he ought not to come to me;—that in *this* house a meeting between us would be sacrilege;—that there is not a spot on earth so far from my husband's grave as to admit of my holding his hand again in mine. —Still, it is *very* terrible to feel oneself quite forgotten, quite alone, with such memories as mine, with such prospects as mine!—I dare not quit this house, because elsewhere than in its quiet seclusion I might be seen and pointed at, and so want courage to bear out till the end. But you know not what it is to remain here. You know not what it is, in the hush of night, to fancy you hear voices — still, small voices, accusing you; and the shadows of those you love—that is, those you *once* loved,—for I love nothing, *nothing* now,—gliding betwixt you and the wall. This house was never a cheerful one," continued she, with a grievous smile. "But

you cannot guess what it is now that I have peopled it with such terrible recollections."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Stanley, you ought to quit the place!" pleaded I. "Your health, your reason will give way under such perpetual excitement."

Poor Ethel shook her head mournfully, by way of reply.

"You are not in a natural state of body or mind," continued I; "and, so far from remaining in this gloomy spot, you want change of air,—you want change of scene."

"I want nothing,—*nothing* but rest,—and rest I shall soon have," rejoined the widow. "I have been unconsciously nursing a hope, which vanishes as I listen to your quiet words, that, being so near him, he would at least take some measure to assure me that my sufferings and shame were not a matter of indifference to him. But now that even that last expectation has left me....."

There was such deep despondency in her face, that I stupidly fancied I should be lessening the influence of Barty's ungrateful neglect, by apprizing her of his absence.

"Mr. Brookes is not at Windsor," said I; "nor will he be here again for weeks."

"And where, then, is he gone?"

"He left no address. His letters are forwarded to his agent's."

"He left no address?" cried she, justly interpreting this into a precaution lest she should molest him with letters. "But *somebody* must know where he is?" she continued, rousing herself from the reverie into which for a moment she had fallen. "Selfish as he is, he has friends. You yourself are his friend. Tell me therefore honestly, is he at Brighton with those people,—those people by whose fortune he was so shamefully dazzled,—those people who were the cause of all my distraction?"—

"The Juckesons?—certainly not!"

“Heaven be thanked!—*That* is really beyond my hopes. But if you know so positively that he is not there, you must surmise where he is.—Do not fancy I wish to know it for any blameable purpose.—I am not going to address him. I am not about to trouble him further. He will have no care or molestation on *my* account. But I want to be sure exactly *where*, when the worst is over for me, an intimation of it might reach him, and satisfy his mind that he will be annoyed no more on my account.”

Her face became slightly convulsed, and I was in hopes she was going to experience the relief of tears. I was mistaken. Her lips quivered, and she closed her eyes for a moment. But it was only in the effort to subdue the anguish of some inward pang.

“If you will give me leave, dear Mrs. Stanley,” said I, fearing the interview was becoming too much for her strength, “I will make inquiries on the subject that interests

you, and to-morrow let you know the result."

Not that I had any intention of lending my aid towards a reconciliation between her and Barty; not that I was not fully aware of his being lost to her for ever; but the fragility of her state rendered it necessary to temporize.

"Suffer me to ring for your female attendant before I leave you," said I, perceiving that she had laid down her heavy head on the table near which she was sitting, as if unable to support herself. And, having hastily rung the bell, I took her unresisting hand between mine, and mingled with a thousand endearing words of consolation my repeated assurances that I would return the following day.

"I am afraid, sir, you found her worse than you expected," said Robson, who, as he guided me across the damp, chill hall, noted the depression of my feelings.

“Never was human being more heart-broken !” said I.

“And yet, sir,” rejoined the old man, in a still closer whisper, “as yet, my poor, dear lady does not know the worst that is awaiting her. They are afraid of telling her. The doctors say that if she were to obtain an inkling of the contents of the will, they would not answer for the consequences. I heard them tell the executors so, when they wanted to remove her from the house.”

“I do not believe pecuniary troubles would increase her sufferings !” said I, as I quitted the house. But I could not forbear adding my secret prayer to poor Robson’s parting ejaculation that—“God would temper the wind to the shorn-lamb !” Save in divine mercy, what hope for her *now* !—

CHAPTER X.

Dis moi, que je m'égare,

Dis qu'il veut m'éprouver, mais qu'il n'est point barbare.

Dis qu'il va revenir,—qu'il revient;—trompe moi,—

Mais obtiens qu'il me trompe à son tour, comme toi.

Va le lui demander,—va l'implorer!—Demeure,

L'orgueil est entre nous,—il glace,—il est mortel!—

Je sens qu'il me fuit, et qu'il faut que je meure.

DESBORDES-VALMORE.

I shall be blamed by many of my readers, but I trust forgiven by a few, when I admit that, the following day, I despatched to Wrenhurst Park a full, true, and particular account of all I had witnessed.

“Much as I applaud the principle,” said I, “which doubtless prompted you to break off a connection already productive of such fatal results, I should not be justified if I

allowed you to remain in ignorance of the state of mind of this unhappy sufferer. What would be your remorse, were she to fall a sacrifice to her despair at being thus abruptly shaken off?"

After the letter was despatched, I felt easier; though my mind misgave me that Barty would evade the dilemma by returning no answer, as though it had never reached his hand.

But, alas! the corroding influence of money-love and the total subjection of his nature to the worship of the molten calf, had converted my friend Barty into a fine, gay, bold-faced villain; and, so far from shrinking from the correspondence, he wrote by return of post to apprise me that he was at a loss to conceive what part I considered myself privileged to act in the business?

"As regards the lady whom you call, (as ladies are apt to be called in tribulations extending through three volumes octavo,) a 'much injured victim,' I can only say that she

resembles the rest of her sex ; ever ready to bring down mountains toppling on their heads, but to shriek and bewail themselves all the time they are falling. I shall cease even to pity her, seeing that she has engaged so doughty a champion as yourself ; if indeed she ever deserved aught but congratulation on her riddance from a peevish, narrow-minded, old tyrant, who, if a monster for making her his wife, has at least made justifiable atonement by making her his widow. Has Mrs. Stanley already forgotten what a bore she used to think him ?—I shall be back at Windsor, (as the adjutant might have informed you,) by the 10th of April ; when I hope to hear a better report of the sick room ; for it is plain you have taken out your diploma and are officiating as a dispenser of juleps. May you live to be knighted, and the shadows of your fair patients never be less !—

“ I find Wrenhurst prodigiously improved. Lady Brookes has turned out a housewife of

indefatigable activity, without an idea or ambition beyond her park paling;—so you see that she understood her vocation far better than I did. My brother meanwhile has progressed into a fox-hunting squire,—good, for nothing but to squeeze his tenants and his wife, and leave an improved estate and a marble monument to the parish. The only works of the day ‘ordered to lie on the table’ at Wrenhurst, are ‘The Muck Manual’ and ‘The Farm;’—*chef-d’œuvres* by which John Murray and Blackwood endeavour to atone to the world of materialism which has succeeded to the world of letters, for the sin of having enriched our literature with Adam Blair and Don Juan.

“In short, my dear Percy, the positive, in its most solid sense, is the leading influence of the whole family of Brookes; and if you find yourself in vein poetic, just now, I strongly recommend you to address yourself elsewhere.”

How I longed to reply as it deserved to this coarse epistle ! But to provoke a paper-war with the brother of Harriet, was a thing that required more courage than half a dozen duels. Better meet his flighty impertinence with silent contempt ; and soothe by palliatives the suspense of Mrs. Stanley, till the arrival of the 10th of April, now at little more than three weeks' distance.

During that period, I often visited her—bringing tidings of, though no message from, the absent one. But as I had announced his early return, she was patient. She even suffered herself to be comforted by my sympathy. Comprehending from my vague hints that Barty was on a tour—at all events *not* at Brighton, (*that* was the essential point,) she waited.—Alas ! how large a portion of every human life is squandered in waiting !—

I even prevailed upon her, one morning, when the sun shone as bright as if the spring, like a gay girl on the eve of her *début*, were

impatient to make its appearance, to descend, resting upon my arm, the flight of steps leading from the cedar parlour to the little garden.

But the spot was not what it had been. Cheerful as I once thought it, now that the old-fashioned close-shorn evergreens stood out unrelieved by lighter foliage, those shapely yews and clipped arbor-vitæ made it look like a cemetery. Even the bright spring flowers, hepaticas, and Persian violets, springing at their foot reminded one of the little unnatural patchwork parterres which French people plant around their graves.

Poor Mrs. Stanley leaned heavily, *very* heavily on my arm ; — for two months more, and she was to be a mother. But before she could accomplish a second turn of the smooth-rolled, formal gravel-walk, so polished and level that one saw there was no longer a foot remaining to pace its dreary solitude,—she became so faint that I was the first to propose returning to the house. After all, she

judged rightly in secluding herself. Scarcely a fresh object on which she could rest her eye, or a familiar spot to which she could repair, but was fraught with torturing accusations.

My chief comfort after my dispiriting visits to this unhappy woman arose from the thankful eye with which the old butler conducted me across the cheerless hall. Poor Robson seemed grateful to any one that prevented his lady being left wholly to herself. So young, yet so unhappy!—So young, yet so hopeless!—What a destiny!—

Four days before the expiration of the long leave, I was dining at mess after sitting half the morning at Datchet, where, without explicit allusion on either side to Barty's approaching return, both of us were under the happy influence of the hopes which it created—I, because I had made up my mind to a full explanation with him on the subject of my pretensions to his sister's hand,—poor

Ethel, because, though they were to meet no more, to know that he was near her was a comfort for such misery as hers;—when, lo! much to my surprise, Lord James bade us fill our glasses to the health of “the new ensign.”

“What new ensign?” There was no vacancy in the regiment.

“My cousin, Sir Henry Axholm, will join us next week,” said he. “As senior ensign, I, of course, get the lieutenantancy.”

“But *what* ensigncy—*what* lieutenantancy are you talking of?” was the general cry; most of us being convinced that he was only amusing himself at our expense, by one of his idle mystifications.

“Brookes will be gazetted out to-morrow,” said he, perceiving that, unless he condescended to be more circumstantial, no one would believe him. “As he corresponds, I fancy, with one or two of you, I concluded you were in the secret as well as myself.”

Exclamations of wonder now became general. Some were only surprised,—some angry,—some hurt;—and more than one, well-pleased to get rid of a brother officer at little pains, of late, to cultivate a new growth of popularity.

“And so Barty is going out of the army?” inquired one of the older hands. “A deuced stupid thing of him, to throw himself out of his profession!—Barty would have made a smart officer in time.”

“He takes a half-pay lieutenancy, I fancy, in some regiment of the line,—as an excuse for wearing a red coat at foreign courts,” replied Lord James. “But I conclude he has done with soldiering as a profession.”

“Then what is going to become of him?”

“Nay, you must ask Percy, there, who is more in his confidence than *I* am; though he sits looking as glum as though unaware, when Barty quitted us, that he never intended to join again.”

“ I was not with the regiment when Brookes quitted you,” said I, drily, for I was, in truth, bitterly mortified.

“ But you were in constant correspondence with him, and are so now, I presume; for it is not long since I saw a letter addressed to you in his handwriting. No matter!—*I* don’t ask you for his secrets—I leave that to Holliwell, and the rest of them. I have got his lieutenancy, which is enough for *my* purpose!”

And forthwith the conversation turned upon the new ensign. “ How old was he—how tall—how rich?—How long had he left Eton?—Was he fast, or slow?”

“ Again, I beg to refer you to other people,” replied Lord James: “ I always leave my relations to be abused by my friends. If you want Harry Axholm’s character, write over to the Life Guards. Willscourt and Arthur Bruce were at Chaplin’s with him, and can tell you more about him than I can, who

have never seen him since he was an urchin riding cockhorse on my grandfather's cane."

How glad I was to escape their noisy nonsense! Yet no sooner was I alone, than I longed to be back in the messroom, to get rid of my own thoughts. What *could* I say to her! How was she to bear this wholly unexpected blow! Within so short a time of her confinement, the shock might prove fatal.

All I hoped was, to keep it from her for a time. No newspaper ever reached the presence of Mrs. Stanley. She saw only a faithful old nurse, who had never quitted her since her marriage, and the gray-headed butler, both of whom would have cut their tongues out ere they made the slightest allusion to Mr. Brookes. There was consequently some chance that the delusive hopes which had so long comforted her soul, might still, though more than ever delusive, continue to support her.

I now began to discover that, while deceiving *her*, I had also been deceiving myself; flattering myself that mere humanity induced me to devote myself to this deserted sufferer, whereas I had found a selfish pleasure in her company. Mrs. Stanley was the only living being to whom I could talk of Harriet,—talk of her as she deserved to be talked of;—for that the object of my affections bore the name of Brookes sufficed to secure the sympathy of the unhappy Ethel.

By degrees, she almost persuaded me that it was to please *her* I entered into such profuse details concerning Oak Hill; the nipped-in-the-bud romance of the quiet little maiden aunt, and the pure and lady-like simplicity of the unworldly niece. Even the colour of her eyes, even the tinge of her hair, possessed interest for one to whom they recalled the eyes and hair of a person whom she was never to see again, and whom she knew that it behoved her to forget.

In this reciprocity of feeling consisted half our mutual good-will;—each being to the other a link to the real object of our affections. Mrs. Stanley's sudden removal from Datchet would have deprived me of my only confidante, if the name of confidante can be applied to a person to whom nothing was confided; and when the Gazette of the following evening confirmed Lord James's report, I trembled for *her* with deepfelt fears;—but a little, I admit, for myself.

Barty's prospects were sure to be pretty freely canvassed at mess. But it was no longer to me, it was to Lord James, that the youngsters addressed themselves for information.

“What the deuce is Master Barty going to do with himself?” said one of the junior ensigns. “He can't have stripped off his red coat to change it for a black one, as Tom Trevor did; for the Brookeses have no preference to give away.—They are my own

county people—and I know they have neither church patronage nor borough interest. I remember the thing being canvassed at my father's, when there was a talk of Sir Robert's standing for the county."

"If he have no *pis aller* of that kind in prospect, and the Juckesons don't come down handsomely, the loving couple must starve!"—added the son of an opulent East India director, who looked upon anything short of turtle and venison as starvation.

"And thurely I've heard that Brookth had only a mithewable five thouthand pounds left him by hith father?" added little Harry Gilman, better known in the regiment as the ringtailed Macauca.

"That's *it*!" cried Lord James. "It is because he has got only five thousand pounds that he is wise enough to leave the regiment. Five thousand pounds will never push him on. His old godfather, who gave him his commission, did not leave him a guinea; and five

thousand pounds is only a genteel sort of beggary for a fellow with pretensions to live in the world; to which Barty, with *his* person and popularity, naturally aspires."

"But how is going out of the Guards to make him richer?" pleaded the city scion. "He could have lived as cheap with his regiment as anywhere else?"—

"Perhaps he wanted to realize.—Perhaps he has made up his mind to be a man, or a mouse. Old Broadham, his quondam guardian (with whom, by the way, he spent a week or ten days before he proceeded into Yorkshire), could easily give him a slice of a good thing now and then, by which his little capital might be doubled."

"Oh, Barty is going to speculate, eh!" cried the others, jumping at once at a conclusion. "I wish him joy! In that case, he may have to figure a second time in the Gazette.—I wish him joy—I wish him joy!"

"Perhaps you think that, as he always

dearly loved the chink of the coin, he is going to be old Broadham's cashier?" cried Lord James, amused to find their interest so strongly excited. "No, no! I fancy Barty's speculations are on a grander scale. Depend upon it, all these visits to my guardian, and visits to my brother, and getting his little capital within a ring-fence by selling out, are indications of a consummation no less devoutly to be wished, than a marriage settlement."

"Thothe horrid Juckthonth!—Barty ith going to be thpithed and thplithed!" ejaculated little Harry Gilman.

"I know nothing about spiced or spliced!" retorted Lord James. "All I can tell you is, that Barty ordered his purchase-money to be booked up at old Broadham's Lombard Street concern; and that he was in a deuce of a hurry to get his traps booked off from hence to ——— But enough, and more than enough," cried he, catching sight of my

face, and perceiving how intently I was listening. "Barty is no longer one of *us* ; and we have no right to render his comings and goings as notorious as if advertised in the Hue and Cry."

"Whereth the good of hith making a mythewy about it?" whispered little Gilman, aside, to me. "Everybody knowth that old Broadham ith over head and earth in railroadth. I darethay he hath bamboothled poor Barty into hatharding hith little all in thome tottewing conthern."

All this was more than vexations. Deeply mortified on my own account, deeply anxious on Barty's, I was grieved, even to consternation, by the prospects of Ethel.

"I am sure you bring me good news to-day!" said she, when, the following afternoon, I arrived at Datchet a trifle earlier than my wont ; conscious that, in spite of my endeavours to look unmoved, a burning flush was patching my cheeks with shame. "' Beau-

tiful are the feet of the bringers of good tidings!" continued she. "I was watching for you from my chamber-window, and could see, as you crossed the courtyard, that your footsteps were those of a pre-occupied mind."

"I was thinking," said I, conscious of the necessity of imparting strength to her enfeebled frame, "that the weather being so favourable this morning, you might be induced to get into the carriage, and extend your airing as far as the park."

An involuntary shudder pervaded her frame at the proposal;—for, since poor Stanley's death, she had never entered the carriage. It had, however, been left her, as an act of humanity by the executors, in consideration of her infirm health; for till the end of a year, they were not forced to alter the arrangements of the Datchet establishment.

It seemed, however, to occur to her, on second thoughts, that I must have some

ulterior motive for a proposal so unusual. Perhaps *he* was come. Perhaps I had made such arrangements with my friend, that, in the course of the drive, she should be seen by him, unseen! The very thought brought to her wan cheeks a glow almost rivalling my own; and, ringing the bell abruptly, she desired the horses might be put to. Unprepared for such an order, difficulties of course arose.

But she overmastered them all. She resumed her voice of authority, her energy, her good sense. Within an hour, I had assisted her into the carriage, and bidden the coachman proceed to Bishopsgate.

But the time that had elapsed in preparation, had caused the beauty of that lovely spring day to evaporate before we reached the park. The sunshine was gone; the plantations had resumed their cold, leafless aspect; the birds had ceased to sing. And her dispirited and shuddering recognition of

the well-known objects that met her eye, caused me almost to regret the success of my proposition.

Fortunately, a glimpse of a distant riding-party, which contained several officers of the Guards and Life-guards, imparted a momentary interest to the scene. One of them reined up his horse for a moment, and tarried behind the rest, as if looking towards us; and as we were, luckily, at too great a distance for her to perceive that it was only little Harry Gilman, I saw by her change of colour that she fancied the object of her drive was accomplished.

Before we parted, she proposed, of her own accord, that on the day after the morrow we should drive again. Not on the day *following*, for it was the sabbath; a day on which she never admitted me to her presence, but devoted it to unremitting devotion. And on occasion of this second drive, we were fortunate in one of those summer-like

days of spring, when you seem to see the grass rise and the leaves expand under the genial glow. The breath of Heaven was propitious !

“ Your friend has brought sunshine with him,” said the poor infatuated creature ; and she spoke with a smile of such implicit confidence, that I felt ashamed of my well-intended duplicity.

I forgave myself, however, on perceiving how much her spirits were revived by the aspect of reviving nature. The orchards in bloom, the lilac bushes on the point of expanding into blossom, the cattle luxuriating in the green pastures, and the intensely blue sky bending over all, seemed to her humbled eye like gracious intimations from above that her fault might be forgiven ;—that there were better days in store ;—that there was joy in heaven over the sinner that repented.

Scarcely a day now passed but we either walked round the paddock opening from her

little garden, or took a gentle airing in Windsor Park or forest. That we were seen by several of my brother-officers, was inevitable; and that they found my *tête-à-tête* with the widow exceedingly diverting, was of course equally true. But though convinced that, through Lord James, my *dévouement* would reach the ears of Barty, I submitted; so satisfied was I of my own motives in the compassionate act. Moreover, I had the consolation of perceiving such wonderful improvement in the aspect and health of Mrs. Stanley, that the sweetness of the first May morning, with its breath of hawthorns, "tune of birds, and lapse of streams," produced almost as much effect on my own feelings, as upon hers. I was beginning to suspect that, after all, this world might be a spot assigned us to be happy.

I know not whether she were disappointed that Barty did not show himself more openly; or gratified that he should submit thus im-

plicitly to the determination she had expressed in the first trying moments of her widowhood, never to see his face again. Perhaps she expected, day after day, as she quitted the house, that chance would favour their meeting. For, day after day, she grew more anxious for her drive. Unwilling to go alone, from a sort of nervous dread of she knew not what, she was almost peevish when my turn of duty rendered it impossible for me to bear her company.

One afternoon—a cheerful, glowing afternoon, early in May, when, as I approached Datchet, the old crumbling garden-wall presented a mass of the variegated blossoms of the antirrhinum, with huge domes of lilacs intermingling, above, their exuberant bloom with the surfy balls of the gueldres rose, and milk-white blossoms of the double hawthorn; so that one could not wonder at the exulting tones of the nightingales pouring their summer-song on every side,—as I entered the

iron gates, I saw old Robson standing on the huge stone door-steps, on which the gardener had been placing that morning, by annual custom, the hardier of the greenhouse plants. His poor old wrinkled, care-crazed face was beaming with smiles; smiles of more significance than regarded the mere auspiciousness of the weather, or the restoration of his favourite old myrtles and geraniums.

Yes!—"His mistress was safe! She was the mother of a boy.—God had been with her.—Her pangs had been mercifully sustained.—She was asleep.—The doctor had left the house.—No one was in the nursery but old Mary and the nurse. Would I like to see the child?"—

The nursery!—a nursery at Lisbon House! No! I had no curiosity to see the child. I trusted the sight of it might comfort *her*. It could not comfort *me*. I dreaded to discern in its infant features an accusing resemblance,

reminding me of its affinity to one I loved.
Poor child of wrath!—Heaven send it might
be come, like Paraclete the Comforter, to
restore peace and health to its mother!—

CHAPTER XI.

Nos fautes ne sont pas toujours immédiatement punies. Afin de nous rendre le châtement plus sensible, Dieu nous fait échouer dans quelque entreprise raisonnable, et nous livre à l'injustice des hommes.

CHATEAUBRIAND.

I believe I have already admitted that my letters to Oak Hill abstained from all allusion to my intimacy with Mrs. Stanley. In the first place, I felt a natural repugnance to advert, even remotely, to a secret so unfit for the participation of a being chaste as Harriet; more particularly as not a letter I ever addressed her but ran the risk of falling into the hands of Mrs. Brookes; the very woman to have resented a confidence of such a nature, almost more than my clandestine engagement to her niece. In the next place, it was im-

possible to allude to Datchet and its sorrows, without describing the conduct of Barty in terms I should not have forgiven myself for using to his sister.

I could not, however, on the great day, resist my inclination to address a letter to the sharer of all my joys and sorrows, (with whom, as is usually the case in such absences, my correspondence had of late insensibly slackened,) telling her how happy I felt, and that, some day or other, I would communicate to her the origin of my joy; but that at present she must content herself with congratulating me on the accomplishment of one of my earnest wishes, without inquiring why or wherefore.

The letter had not been long in the post, before I half repented my communicative vein.

“And when do you give us caudle, eh, Percy?”—inquired Lord James, the following day at mess.

“I hope you intend to invite us to the christening?” added the city ensign. “I have had immense practice in that way among my country cousins; and am quite qualified to act as proxy, if the sponsors and their apostle spoons should not be forthcoming.”

I replied fractiously, for on this sacred subject I could not stand being quizzed; and was of course forced to pay the penalty of my ill-humour. Nothing that could be devised was spared me in the way of allusion to my nursery propensities. The birth of this unfortunate babe was made the subject of such biting jests, that I saw it was not Barty who was supposed to feel a paternal interest in the event.

It was in vain I protested,—in vain I resented,—in vain I threatened. Lord James or some other equally mischievous person had been at the pains of creating an impression that my humane visits to Datchet were the result of a warm and fortunate attachment.

“ I have half a mind to write word to Barty Brookes, how well you look in his old clothes !” said his lordship in a tone of the most provoking sarcasm. “ I have got a half-written letter to him in my desk ; and will add to my congratulations on his marriage my congratulations on having so sad an incumbrance taken off his hands.”

“ His marriage ?” — cried I, too much startled by *that* announcement to heed the offence conveyed in the other.

“ By this time, poor fellow, I suppose he must be turned off. His family have behaved amazingly well to him. On finding old Juckeson disposed to double whatever Barty could lay down, the cubbish baronet forked out handsomely ; and even a maiden aunt he has got, somewhere in the Eastern counties, produced a few scurvy thousands from the savings’ bank. Between these gratuities, his commission, and patrimony, Barty contrived to scrape together a capital of sixteen thou-

sand pounds. Upon which Cloves and Cinnamon, who, believing he had only five, had promised twice as much to his niece, was forced to produce two-and-thirty. And so, by fair means or foul, Barty has become a Man of Capital.—And Barty will be a happy man.—Barty loves money like his own soul.—Barty would have sold his own brother into slavery, like Joseph's brethren, if he could have secured a long price for him."

For some time past, the mystery with which I was forced to envelop my intimacy at Datchet, as regarded Harriet, had been pain and grief to me. Concealment of any kind betwixt me and my plighted love was insupportable. I felt that every thought, every feeling, every look, every word of mine in which she had not her share, was on *my* part a crime.

Never, however, had this consciousness weighed upon me so heavily as now that the safety of poor Mrs. Stanley and the comfort

she took in her child inspired me with feelings that I longed to pour into the heart of Harriet. To withhold from her my anxiety and indignation, had been comparatively easy. But I could not forgive myself an unanticipated emotion of joy.

For as soon as Mrs. Stanley could sit up, I was admitted to her presence; that is, not *admitted*, but besought to pay her a visit;—that I might behold this treasure—this little one—this pearl of price, bestowed on one whom all the world had abandoned.

“ Too much happiness — too much, too much for one like *me* ! ” — was her faint ejaculation, when first the babe was laid upon her aching bosom. “ In my youth, when good and blameless, I had not a single relative to love me. My blood ran not in the veins of any living thing. If unhappy, there was no one to feel for me. If I had died, there was no one to mourn. And now—now that I have rendered myself an outcast—now that

I ought to shrink from looking people in the face, this blessing is vouchsafed me, — this fair and sinless creature, that will love me whatever my faults !”

These touching words were repeated to me by old Mary, when first, with tears in her eyes, she gave me an account of her lady’s progress and the beauty of her little nursing ; and I was consequently prepared, in obeying her invitation the very day Mrs. Stanley was moved into her dressing-room, to find her in a state of enthusiastic exaltation of mind.

It was now June—balm-breathing, hope-inspiring June. The fountain was again playing in the little garden, and the evergreens had lost their gloomy prominence, surrounded as they were by a wilderness of roses, the tender green of the tulip-tree, and masses of entangled woodbine and clematis, around which the bees were murmuring their admiring joy. Even at the sick

chamber, the windows were open, to admit the warm and perfumed atmosphere from without; and when I entered it, had it been a sister of my own who lay extended on the sofa, which was so placed as to command a view of the garden, I could scarcely have felt more moved by the aspect of the sweet, pale face before me, or the slender delicacy of the hands extended towards me in grateful recognition.

She received me with tears—actually with tears; and besought my blessing for her child as though she thought it, more than other children, in need of the protection of Heaven. Poor soul! there was something painful in the way she lay looking at it, and the fervour with which she pressed her trembling lips to its little brow,—its tiny hand—nay, even to the hem of the garment. For after all, children are casual things. The strongest of them has a thousand perils threatening its feeble infancy. And one saw that if she *were* to

lose it — but in *her* presence, I had not courage even to imagine such a chance!—

The kiss which, in my turn, I bestowed upon the babe, was inspired, however, by feelings, in which Mrs. Stanley had little share. I traced, or fancied I could trace in its tiny features some vestige of the Brookes countenance—a something of Harriet, which searched into the very depths of my heart.

“ I feel so ashamed *now*,” faltered the happy mother, fancying she could perceive by this tender embrace of her child that my friendship towards her was unchanged, “ I feel so ashamed *now* of all I said to you a few weeks ago of my disgust and weariness of life. I had not *then* heard the cry of this little creature!—I did not *then* know what it was to have something belonging to one,—something of one’s own,—that one can clasp to one’s heart, without fear of coldness, or mockery, or ingratitude!—Oh, I know better now, than to say I am sick of life!”

The gentle bloom that tinged her cheek from the exertion of speaking,—the slight moisture that trembled in her violet-coloured eyes,—the fond, fond smile, that hovered upon her lips, endowed her countenance at that moment with almost superhuman beauty. I have seen just such faces, in pictures by the old masters, concentrating all the holiness and joy of mother-love into the face of an enraptured madonna, leaning over the babe of grace.

“ *You* never deserted me in my misery, and God will bless you for it!”—said she, “ for to comfort the unhappy is, indeed, a Christian act. But you must not desert me, either, in my present great joy; for I sometimes think my heart will break with the fulness of its love, and your company will inspire me with the serenity of which I stand so much in need. You will be godfather to my poor babe—will you not?—You will give it your name at the baptismal font?—That of

your friend would excite too many surmises, too many comments; and it would be a shameful mockery to assign it that of my husband."

"But since, under any circumstances, it must bear that of Stanley..."

"Yes, legally! but by no act or deed of mine. Had I my own will, it should be otherwise; nor will I be guilty of the deliberate treachery of giving it Mr. Stanley's Christian name."

"Name it Percy, then, with all my heart!" cried I. "As your sincere and attached friend, there will be nothing surprising in my becoming its sponsor."

And from the eagerness with which she thanked me for what *she* called a concession, I saw it was passing in her mind, that, had the circumstances been different, as the bosom friend of Barty, I should naturally have become godfather to the first-born of his wedded love.

She seemed over-anxious that it should be baptized. "It was doubly in want of the waters of purification!"—And, ere I quitted her, it was settled between us that, on the last day of the month of her confinement, I should come, accompanied by the curate of Old Windsor (an intimate friend of mine), for the solemnization of the sacred rite.

"And the godmother?"

"The godmother is my faithful old Mary, if you will not be offended at finding yourself joined with her on the occasion!" replied Mrs. Stanley. "I have no other friend who might not take the application amiss. But had I a thousand at command, *which* of them would cleave to me in my misery as she has done, in warm and disinterested love to me and mine!"

Cheerfully did I accept my companion in office. But I could not help feeling how eagerly, had she been aware of the circumstances, my kind-hearted Harriet would have

accepted the sponsorship of the helpless little one, upon whom its fellow-creatures were so ready to vent their scorn on the threshold of life.

I was left just then to enjoy my summer rambles pretty nearly as I listed. Lord James was off, on leave, for a fortnight's enjoyment of the London season; and the mess profited by his absence to wreak on his raw cousin, Sir Henry Axholm, all the spites created by the sauciness of one, who might have taken out a patent for being impertinent. For some time past, they had abandoned *me* to my devices; for a person undisguisedly pre-engrossed, ceases to be available to his companions, even as a butt. My thoughts were too much distracted between Oak Hill and Datchet, to admit of perceiving even when I was laughed at.

That my cares were divided was, strange to tell, a relief. But for the critical state of things at Lisbon House, and my dread lest

the premature discovery of Barty's marriage should complete the mischief he had wrought, I should have experienced far greater uneasiness at a sort of constraint which I began to perceive, or fancied I could perceive, in the letters of Harriet.—She certainly did not write as she used.—Was I to infer from this, that she did not *feel* as she used?

I was beset by vague apprehensions that her brother's renewed intercourse with his family boded little good to my cause. Gold had eaten into his soul, till his ruling passion superseded even the claims of friendship. It would have been out of his present nature not to advocate the pretensions of Lord Donnington; and the munificent donation made him on occasion of his worldly-wise match, by his maiden aunt, who had always declared her fortune pledged to the niece to whom, from her birth, she had acted the part of a mother, inspired me with some misgivings that Mrs. Brookes would not have alienated

from Harriet what she had taught her to regard as hers, but for the conviction that she was about to form a match too brilliant to admit of so small a portion being acceptable.

The *aunt's* convictions, however, would have signified little, had they not been seconded by the growing reserve of the niece. Like other nervous people, I was *afraid* of verifying the exact state of the case ! I dared not write to Harriet, and say, frankly, " Tell me the worst. If you repent your intentions in my favour, let me learn it at once, and from yourself." I preferred being deceived ; for, alas ! the confirmation of my fears would have conveyed my sentence of death.

At times, however, I grew desperate, and determined to know all ;—whether I had forfeited her affection, and by whose cruel interposition. What letters I wrote her—what appeals to her justice — what appeals to her mercy—what outpourings of all that was in

my heart—those unimaginable mines of tenderness, deep hidden under a seemingly barren soil, but revealed by the divining rod of the adept! Whole nights did I devote to the expression of my feelings! But, when the morrow came, and daylight and reason dawned together on my impassioned vigils, every line I had written was impetuously destroyed; and I subsided into the restless, repining, but submissive lover, who knows his claims to be so slender, that he dare not afford a provocation which may bring them to judgment. A pitiful fear that Harriet only wanted a pretext to avow her change of mind, suspended my movements.

On the other hand, as the time drew near for my explanation with Mrs. Stanley, my heart sickened at the prospect. Though my personal liking for Brookes was almost wholly extinguished by his cold-hearted and barefaced baseness, still, he was Harriet's brother; and I recoiled from having to say,

“This man whom you so loved, this man who so speciously won your affections, has sacrificed you to his interests in life.”

Judge, therefore, compassionate reader—judge of my surprise and joy, when, after the most careful preparation, I at length stammered out the terrible announcement of his marriage, instead of the frantic emotions I had anticipated, instead of shrieks or swoons, I saw her gently raise her eyes to heaven; then, having bowed her head for some minutes in silence over the babe that was lying upon her knees, heard her murmur the simple ejaculation of—“*Now*, it is all my own !”

I had previously noted, that from the first moment that the all-potent instinct of maternal love was roused in her heart, the influence of other feelings had been subsiding. Her fondness for her old nurse, her grateful regard for myself, even the poignancy of remorse connected with the memory of her

husband, gave way before that predominant influence of almost every female bosom. All her looks, all her feelings were concentrated on her child. To that, at least, she might be all in all. From *that*, she had no inconstancy, no cruelty to apprehend. After all I had feared for her health, for her reason, for her peace, from the discovery of Barty's abandonment, I verily believe it was a relief to her to feel that an eternal barrier was placed between her and one who might have established a rivalry with her in that little heart; or, worse still, have endangered, at some future time, the filial love and deference of her son.

"Now I am happy!" cried I, when, before I took leave of her that day, I saw that her usual gentle gravity had experienced no interruption from our trying explanation. "Now I can look forward to little Percy's christening as a day of comfort. I can scarcely tell you, dear Mrs. Stanley, what a weight is removed from my mind!"

“It is a puzzling task to interpret the feelings of others,” was her rejoinder; “and I have no right to expect you should augur *very* favourably of mine. Still, I think you might have guessed that the possession of a treasure beyond my fondest hopes renders me less disposed to grudge the happiness of others. Let all be blessed in their own way. He cares for nothing but riches, and he has got them. *I* care for nothing but the interchange of an engrossing affection; and it is in store for me *here*. *I* shall live for love, and *he* for money!—We are both more fortunate than we deserve.”

On the christening-day, therefore, I was not surprised to find her composed to a sort of seraphic serenity, as she contemplated the little face of the creature about to be placed under the protection of Divine Grace—the creature that was to be all in all to her,—the child that was to replace the loss of parents, husband, lover, friend!

Old Mary, with the superstition of her

calling, had laid aside her suit of sables, and prevailed upon Robson to do the same. Even the little cap and robe of the babe were adorned by the old woman with the white satin bows customary to such occasions; nor had her lady the heart to mortify the old creature by destroying her handiwork. Mr. Stanley had now been six months in the grave; and even the officiating clergyman would see nothing indecorous in the renouncement of mourning for an occasion replete with pious joy.

The very season and the scene seemed to second our attempts at cheerfulness. It was the full rose-tide of the year; and huge bouquets of those exquisite and heart-rejoicing flowers were placed by the servants in every corner of the grim old mansion, so as to grace it for a moment with a blush of beauty and youth. The fragrance of the atmosphere thus created operated on my feelings like a charm, as we crossed the threshold.

My reverend friend, John Barnard, who, without being in my confidence, had gathered enough from the reports of the neighbourhood to be aware that circumstances of a delicate and painful nature attended the widowhood of Mrs. Stanley, could not forbear congratulating me, as her friend, on the favourable change that had taken place in her appearance, since, shortly before the birth of her child, he had administered to her the holiest rite of our faith. But as I was satisfied that he would not have overcome his scruples concerning the baptism of infants in church, except from belief that the mother was still incapable of quitting the house, I made no answer when he pointed out the exquisite bloom that mantled on her cheek while instructing poor old Mary in her duties of the day.

I verily believe I was the most nervous of the party, during the few minutes occupied by the baptismal vow !—Barnard was inspired

by the sentiments becoming his calling ; poor Ethel by the inexpressible joy of presenting her child, her breathing child—her own, her only—to the lustration of grace. I alone remembered the sufferings of which it had been the cause under that roof, or the sin of which it was the seal. And I alone trembled, “ rebuked by judgment to come.”

So heartfelt, however, was the mother’s hopeful joy, that, unwilling to dispirit her by the sight of my grave countenance, I hurried the departure of Barnard the moment the ceremony was complete, that our presence might form no obstacle to the indulgence of her intense emotions.

As we were quitting the house, I noticed, standing in the hall, a servant in livery, who looked as if waiting for an answer to a letter ; a circumstance of such rare occurrence in that deserted house, that, but for Barnard being at my side, it might have excited my curiosity. As it was, my chief anxiety was

to get him away; and, though the mid-summer sun was at its hottest, I walked him off and walked him on towards his own house, as if we had been in January instead of June.

Having accompanied Barnard home, as I had purposely prevented his sitting down to the collation prepared for us at Datchet, I could not decently decline his warm invitation to me to partake of a fruit luncheon that was awaiting him, and applaud some strawberries which, like every country curate's homegrown strawberries, were "the finest in the world." It was consequently some time before I got back to the barracks:—where the first thing I saw was old Robson awaiting my return.

"I must come back to Datchet immediately. If I had the least regard for his poor lady, I must hasten back to Lisbon House." Something terrible had occurred,—he scarcely seemed to know what. Mrs.

Stanley had been in a succession of fainting fits; between which, the only intelligible word she had been heard to utter, was my name.

“A letter *was* brought, then, by that fellow in the green livery! I thought so?” cried I. And though sorely disinclined to venture out again in the heat of the day, I could not refuse to step into the carriage and accompany him back.

Re-admitted to the presence of Mrs. Stanley, I could scarcely persuade myself that it was the same person I had quitted two hours before.—An age seemed to have passed over her head. An utter transformation seemed to have changed her very nature.

She was indeed, as old Robson had described her, almost inarticulate. One might have believed she had undergone a paralytic seizure.

“Read *that*!” muttered she,—perceiving that her attempts at explanation left me

more confused and amazed than before. And snatching a letter from her pillow, she placed it in my hand.—“Read it,—and tell me whether I am not sufficiently punished *now* !”

I read, as she desired me,—though not so collectedly as I could wish:—for between every sentence I could overhear her indistinct mutterings of “ ‘ Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord !’ His vengeance *hath* reached me. His vengeance hath indeed reached me !—But my punishment is greater than I can bear !”—

CHAPTER XII.

Preach some philosophy to make me mad,
And in return, thou shalt be canoniz'd.
For being *not* mad, but sensible of grief,
My reasonable part produces reason
How I may be deliver'd of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself;
If I were mad, I should forget my woes.

SHAKSPEARE.

If any thing *could* justify implacability in a Christian nature, it is well-grounded jealousy. —Though not by nature cruel, I will not answer to what acts of vengeance I might have been prompted, by infidelity in a wife. But no other motive could justify the infliction of such tortures as I saw endured by poor Ethel, that day, when apprized that neither *my* interference nor that of any other person could save her from the blow announced in the fatal letter!—

Old Stanley's death-bed curse upon her "ungrateful injury" had been "not loud, but deep!" The measure of his vengeance was all the more deadly, for having appeared to pause.

A codicil to his last will decreed that the child, which, by virtue of his marriage settlements, was to succeed to the whole of his property, should be placed under the care of his executors,—who were requested to act as its guardians,—on attaining the age of one month.—"I have no objection," added the letter, "to its being seen by its mother, at proper times and places; but always under the restriction and in presence of one of its guardians."

Of these guardians, one was his banker and friend, Mr. Broadham of Lombard Street; the other, a disappointed brother-in-law, whose children, had his own marriage been unfruitful, would have succeeded to his estate. Neither of them was likely to be over-indul-

gent towards the mother thus bitterly punished; and they had some pretence for administering, with "the utmost rigour of the law," the will of the injured testator.

Old Broadham, however, having had enough of guardianships, it was the brother-in-law, a retired proctor, whose heart was of the consistency of a cuttle-fish, who undertook the charge of the infant; and fancied he was making a kindly concession to the widow, by despatching his footman with the admonitory letter announcing the deprivation of her child, instead of claiming it through one of the clerks of his office.

It was this letter which had to be answered when I arrived at Datchet. But what availed reply?—The power was with *them*,—nay, the necessity of enforcing it was with *them*;—for Stanley had made a handsome legacy to his brother-in-law contingent upon his rigid discharge of his duty.

I wrote, however, in her name, because she

wished it,—wrote because she had sent a verbal message, by the servant, promising to write,—wrote because she had faith (woman-like) in the power of a letter. And all the time I was writing, she kept weeping at my side ; and now and then, started forward and clung to my arm, retarding me in the discharge of my office, to enforce some yet more potent argument—some still tenderer plea than all the rest. Her whole heart was in the words of her suggesting ; and they were like Abel's offering on his altar,—fruit and flowers.—But, alas ! not, as upon them, was the acceptance of Heaven destined to descend upon her prayer !—

I told her so. I warned her that she was humiliating herself for nothing,—that these men had not even the option to befriend her,—that law, as well as conscience, sanctified due discharge of the last wills of those departed.—But still, she wept and prayed so bitterly,—still, there was such hope,—such trust

within her heart,—she was so convinced that no one could refuse a *mother*,—a mother was a character suddenly invested with such thrice holy consequence in her young heart,—that to refuse her was impossible. And the letter was sealed and sent; and poor Ethel fondly flattered herself that her cause was safe.

I never shall forget the smile with which she went and fetched the babe from the cradle, to indulge me with a sight of it, as the best reward that could be offered to my exertions. But old Mary, who knew all, and had witnessed her frantic excitement during the indictment of the letter, whispered to me, when Mrs. Stanley retired with it from the room to discharge her maternal duties, that, as it was, the results of such agitation might prove fatal to her nursling.

“And if anything should happen to the poor infant,” said she, “God help its mother!”—

She also hinted, from her knowledge of the character of the brother-in-law of her late

master, that mercy was as much to be expected of the nether millstone; and on my preparing to quit the house for the second time, her entreaties were still more earnest than those of Mrs. Stanley, that I would return to Datchet at an early hour on the morrow, to assist her poor mistress with my advice.

I wish I had not complied with her request. For it was a case in which all counsel was unavailing; and, but for my compliance, I had spared myself the sight of tears, and tones of prayer and anguish that will haunt my memory for ever.

In answer to her letter, the guardian appeared in person, with proper attendants, to remove the child; judging, and perhaps wisely, that delays were dangerous.

But neither he nor I had reckoned, nor could any *man* though “of woman born,” reckon on the force of superhuman energy, kindled by a mother’s love, or the force it can assign to the arm, the voice, the step,

the inspired and frantic eloquence of even the most delicate woman. All that she said, all that she did, all that she promised, might have moved a heart of stone. — It did not touch that of the lawyer.

She told the story of the infant. She proclaimed, to her misery, how much it was hers, — to her shame, that it was not her husband's : and offered, with a sense of renunciation very different from that which had actuated *my* vows in its name the preceding day, to renounce, in its behalf, the pomps and vanities of the world, — to resign all claim to the rich inheritance of Mr. Stanley, and retire with it to some obscure corner, and work for its maintenance, reserving her maiden name, and never to be heard of again by family or friends.

But the man of the law knew better than to regard this as feasible. He knew better than to accept the unchecked overflowings of her generous soul. There was but one path

for him to pursue, that of his duty; and having requested me, in the belief that I was Mrs. Stanley's nearest friend, to remain with her, and take charge of life and limb at such a moment of desperation, he profited by the state of insensibility into which she had fallen on hearing his final negative, to place the nurse and child in his carriage, and hurry from the place. He had already promised me to write tidings of its safety to its unhappy mother; and so to place it, that, as soon as her first despairing frenzy was to be trusted, she might be admitted to frequent interviews. But for the present, he said, it would be best to leave her no address; that, for a time, all communication might be broken off.

"Till all this can be brought about," added he, evidently fancying that he was making a great concession in consideration of the poor widow's affliction, "till all this can be brought about, she is at liberty to re-

main at Datchet. Till the close of the year, the house will not be offered for sale."

I felt almost relieved on hearing the sound of his departing wheels. But the sensation lasted only till Ethel's restoration to consciousness convinced her that all hope was gone,—that the light of her eyes was departed—and then I could have found it in my heart to crawl on my knees in the dust after this man, and pray him to have mercy. I really thought she was dying. I fully expected every moment would prove her last. The convulsions of her overtasked frame were as those of a person labouring under an attack of epilepsy.

The two aged servants of her household entreated me, with tears, not to desert her, or, rather, not to desert *them* in this exigency. There was no one to afford them a single word of advice; and how much, alas, was needed! I remained accordingly — remained the whole of the day,—a day ending

how differently from its joyous commencement! All the preparations were yet apparent. The roses were still disposed throughout the house; and, methought their slightly decaying fragrance evinced only a too grievous unison with the event they purported to adorn.

It was not till very late at night I left Datchet. Ten to one, mischief would be made at some future time, of so prolonged a visit. But I cared not. On *her*, scandal must hereafter fall as on a stone; and as to me, the only person entitled to take umbrage at my doings, was of too generous a nature not to applaud, instead of resenting, my devotedness to one who moved my pity all the more deeply, by reminding me of the helplessness of Harriet.

Next day, matters were worse. Agitation, combined with this sudden weaning of the child, and her carelessness of all precaution, had thrown Mrs. Stanley into a violent fever. Before night she was delirious. It was too

late now for her to be solaced by the return of the little creature her soul so yearned for, which, all day, had been the object of her incoherent prayers. She would no longer have recognized its face. The proof was, that, in her paroxysms, she kept mistaking me for Barty; and throughout the night, in presence not only of poor Mary and the nurse, but of her medical attendant, addressing me the most heart-rending reproaches.

Sometimes, she fancied that the shade of Mr. Stanley approached her bedside; and, oh, how touching were her invocations to him for pity and pardon! She pleaded her wasted youth, like a blighted spring, bringing forth only fruits of bitterness, in extenuation of her frailty. She appealed to him as a father—as him who had replaced *her* father,—to remember how she had been snatched from the obscure monotony of a school-room, and flung uncounselled into the world;—how a mother's care, and female guidance had been wanting.

And then, she told him how she had suffered,—how she had repented,—how she had been spurned and betrayed; and implored, in commiseration of all this, that he would give her back her child—her little one—her only one—the child that was hers alone!

By Heaven's mercy, long hours of stupor succeeded to all this distraction. But she was not the less in danger. Poor old Mary's despair was too deep for tears, and even the physician shook his head.

The following day, I was on duty; and a sad day it was, though I managed twice to ascertain, by message, that poor Mrs. Stanley was no worse. But she was no better. How *could* she be better, while body and soul were thus involved in one common struggle?

To my infinite regret, Lord James's leave was out, and he returned that very day to his quarters. For his wanton levity, that cared not what it aimed at or whom it wounded, was doubly tormenting at such a moment. I

really believe he liked me in his heart, and that his early visit to me, on duty, was for the pleasure of seeing me again. But it seemed to me *then* as if he sought me only for the purpose of affording disagreeable intelligence concerning Barty Brookes.

“ I wish to Heaven, my dear Percy,” said he, “ that you could see him perching like a peacock on his new roost! He and the fair Sabina have obtained the absolute control of old Juckeson’s establishment; and they are giving the best dinners in London—outshining Larch Lodge by a whole buffet of gold plate and half a dozen footmen in appropriate mace-coloured liveries. By clever management, Barty has managed to get up an amazing show of hands in their favour;—old Yorkshire connexions of his family—Eton chums—the Suffolk friends of his sister and aunt,—and among them my fair cousin Lady Georgiana Trench, who has taken half of Mrs. Brookes’s opera-box.”

Barty's wife with an opera-box!—

“And is he the happier for all this ostentation?” was my cold inquiry.

“My dear fellow, I hardly set my eyes upon him. His better half was all I saw;—and so gorgeous, that, like *Peau d’Ane* in her sunbeam-gown, she all but blinded me. Barty is seldom seen west of Temple Bar. Barty has become a city man.—Barty is director of a dozen railroads, and thinks of nothing but money-spinning. The disease engendered when he lived with his old banker-guardian, is breaking out with the utmost virulence. The fellow can talk of nothing but capital. He seems to think he has accomplished the only purpose worth living for, by picking and stealing and scraping together what may be called a fortune.”

“And Lady Georgiana?”—said I, anxious to avoid hearing any more at that moment about Barty.

“Lady Georgiana?—Hillo!—What! are

you going to follow Brookes's example, and sell yourself for a mess of pottage at last?"—

"If I were, I should hardly need to ask you for news of her!" said I. "I was about to inquire, with quite as much interest, after the health of the Mandevales."

"Thank you!—They are as well as can be expected, considering that his lordship has been undergoing the water-cure, to relieve him from the state of perfect health under which, for many years past, he has laboured; and that his wife, like other country-ladies who come up gaping after novelty in the London season, has swallowed the whole science of magnetism at a mouthful. I left her mesmerizing her maid, to ascertain whether her mantuamaker would send home a new satin gown in time for the opera. And now, as you have been so good as to listen to all this without a single yawn, I will answer your query about the widow. Between ourselves, I suspect her hour is come; and *this* time, she

has chosen well ; for Donnington has no wits to lose, like poor Adolphus Trench, and will earn his crown of martyrdom as a mere simpleton to the last."

"You do not mean that she is going to marry Lord Donnington?"

"*She* means it, I fancy ; for they are never apart. I don't know about *him*. But I never knew a man but yourself persist in cruelty to a pretty widow with a pretty jointure, who resolves to have him whether he will or no. They have set up a sort of firm of Donnington, Brookes and Trench, which increases the consequence of all its partners. You have no notion what fine folks Mr. and Mrs. Barty are becoming, under such illustrious patronage ! I never address them except hat in hand, for it is as much as my place is worth not to give them the wall !"

All this would have been matter of rejoicing, or matter of indifference to me, but for the silence of Harriet. To my last two

letters, I had received no answer; and was too proud to write a third, petitioning for kinder entreatment. My offices were just then so painfully in request at Datchet, that I had the less leisure to make myself uneasy. Yet uneasy I was. Even if Lord James's statement of Lord Donnington's change of purpose were correct—even if I had nothing to fear from the evil dealing of others; there is always—*always*—so much to be apprehended from the natural inconstancy of the sex. Women grow weary of waiting. Women find it so difficult to concentrate, in any of the relations or pursuits of life, their attention on a single object. Women are so apt to change, for very wantonness, when every thing on earth conspires to insure their fidelity.—

And, alas! in *my* case, instead of being favoured by conspiring circumstances, everything and everybody was in league to justify the instability of her love. However, as I

said before, I had a primary duty to perform, that forbade all weak indulgence in the fretfulness of desponding love.—I trusted to Providence.—I trusted to Providence even as that poor, broken reed at Datchet trusted to myself!—

CHAPTER XIII.

Du trépas, dans mes yeux, vois la terne lueur,
Donne, oh ! donne moi tu main — dis mon nom — fais
entendre

Quelque mot consolant, s'il ne peut-être tendre !
Des jours qui m'étaient dus, je n'ai que la moitié.
Laisse en aller mon âme en rêvant la pitié !—

ALFRED DE VIGNY.

I had been warned by the physician in attendance at Lisbon House—a good and humane man, as well as a skilful—that, in the event of his succeeding in reducing the high fever by which Mrs. Stanley's mind was now excited, much of her future safety would depend on the nature of the first impressions she received on the dawning of her reason.

When he told me so, I scarcely listened ; for, never before having seen a person affected by delirium, it seemed as impossible to *me*



that the fever *should* subside, as for the dead to arise and walk ! I could conceive nothing but the icy hand of death capable of tranquillizing those frightful paroxysms. But when, on the fourth day after her seizure, old Robson stood awaiting me in the hall, with tidings that an express had arrived from London, from the brother-in-law of Mr. Stanley, who was the passive instrument of his posthumous revenge, entreating that his mistress would hasten to Wimpole Street, for that the infant's life was despaired of, I saw that, great as was the existing evil, worse might betide.

“What answer had been given?” was, of course, my first inquiry. Nor could I much wonder at the indiscreet zeal evinced by the attached old servant, in having despatched back word to the guardians that their relenting had come too late ; that, thanks to their cruelty, his mistress also was on the verge of the grave ; that those who had killed the

child had killed the mother; that she was not even in a state of mind to comprehend the new calamity awaiting her.

“ And Mrs. Stanley herself?” I next inquired.

“ Better — decidedly better. Her night, sir, was far from tranquil; but towards morning, Mary says, she fell into a sweet sleep, as suddenly as the wind sometimes lulls after a storm. When the doctor came this morning, as usual, the first thing in his round of visits, she was still sleeping so composedly, that he would not have her disturbed. He looked in upon her, and said, ‘ Sleep was God Almighty’s medicine, which was always the best;’ and promised to call again in the afternoon. And will you believe it, sir? — the strangest thing — (only that poor Mary’s word is as Gospel truth, I wouldn’t believe it myself) — all my poor mistress’s ravings this blessed night were of her little boy, whom she had never named before since the fatal

christening day ; seeing him in her delusions sick — seeing him dying — and striving and struggling to get at him, to take him into her arms, and nurse him once again.”

Myself a half-believer in magnetic influences, I felt less surprised at this clairvoyance than the old butler.

“ But just on the turn of morning, sir, as Mary, and the nurse the doctors have sent in, were striving to hold her down, hoping that, from sheer fatigue, she would fall asleep at last, she suddenly clasped her hands together, as you have often noticed her do before, sir, and muttered something like, ‘ ’Tis over—God’s will be done!’—and then sank into the deep sleep from which she has not yet awaked.”

I was careful to insist that, when she *did* awake, if the prediction of the good doctor, that her mind would probably be restored to comparative composure were verified, no intimation should be given of the express from

London, so as to hazard the re-disturbance of her faculties. To what purpose? She was as little capable of obeying the summons to visit her dying child, as of attempting a journey to Rome!—It would have been a mere infliction of useless pain.

That day, on my return from what Lord James facetiously called one of my dry-nursing expeditions to Datchet (he called them so but once, however, for the stern expression of my determination not to be made the object of his coarse raillery silenced him in a moment), I found, lying on my table, a packet, addressed in Barty Brookes's handwriting, which had arrived by the London coach.

Convinced that anything despatched to me by the new Dives boded me no good, I felt an inexpressible repugnance to open it. It seemed as if everything issuing from his money-made and money-making house, must smell of pounds, shillings, and pence!

In the present instance I was mistaken. The packet in question savoured only of treachery!—It contained every gift I had ever bestowed upon his sister: a locket, a simple locket of crystal, containing my hair; a Breguet watch, by which I had happened to tell her the hour, in answer to the first question she ever addressed me, and which, two years afterwards, at parting, she accepted from me as a relic; and an old-fashioned sapphire ring, that had been once my mother's, exchanged for one of her own, in solemn trothplight.

My letters, too—not one of them wanting—sealed, and addressed to me in her own well-known handwriting!—No mistaking, therefore, that this cold-hearted and cruel insult was an act and deed of her own!—

But because it *was* so cruel and so cold-hearted, it affected me less than might have been expected from my previous sensitiveness to every cloud that had passed over the

sunshine of my love. I felt only indignant—enraged and indignant. Placing out of sight my claims upon the woman who had pledged herself to be my wife, attributing to petulance, arising from some unexplained mistake, the ungraciousness of *her* conduct—(for even in anger I adhered to my conviction, that *she* could do no wrong)—a long series of services to Barty, a long series of *affectionate* services, rendered it almost infamous that, the moment he found himself established in the world as one of the worshipful community of Mammon, he should turn upon me, and use me like a beggar!—

It was late in the day. Choking with rage, I was forced to sit down to dinner, lest, peradventure, Lord James might have been in my room during my absence, and noticed the parcel addressed by Brookes. And very difficult did I find it to avoid getting into half a dozen quarrels in the course of dinner; ~~so~~ boiling was my blood, and so clearly did

my jaundiced eye discern purpose of offence in even the simplest words addressed me.

Lord James had ridden over to Chertsey; and, having passed the Juckesons' house on his return, announced that he had made inquiries at the lodge, and that the family were not expected down during the summer or autumn. The furniture, in fact, had been partly sent to town.

"Brookes has evidently determined those two superannuated idiots to settle in some other of their country seats!" said he. "I suppose he was afraid of having too many scrubby hangers-on, among his old friends hereabouts."

And though this sortie could not possibly apply to his brother officers (the battalion being already under orders for Winchester), I could not help fancying that his eye rested upon *me*, as he pronounced the word "scrubby."

At last my ordeal was over; and, disen-

tangling myself with some difficulty from my companions, I rushed up into my room, and bolted myself in, to ponder upon my injuries. Having thrown myself on my sofa, I trusted to enjoy an hour's peaceful deliberation upon the steps I had yet to take.

Alas! ere half that time had expired, a loud tap at the door arrested the course of my bitter reflections. Concluding it was one of my brother officers, I resolved not to answer. Again, after a pause, the knock was repeated; and still, I remained sullen and silent. At length a third tap was followed by the voice of the soldier who had formerly officiated as Brookes's servant, and was now mine, addressing me loudly by name.

"A letter, sir!—a letter requiring an immediate answer..."

"From London?" said I, as I instantly half-opened the door, fancying that nothing worthy of my interest could reach me from any other quarter.

“No, sir—from Datchet!”

“From Datchet!” I exclaimed, feeling, I admit, in the peevishness of the moment, that of Datchet I had had something too much.

But when the light was struck, and I saw that the letter addressed in a strange writing, which was placed in my hand, contained a few scarcely intelligible and incoherent lines, traced by the hand of poor Ethel herself—yes! actually by the hand of poor Ethel—I reproached myself for my selfish petulance.

“Come to me, kindest and best of friends,” wrote she, “that I may see you once more before I die.”

Could I forbear?—could I hesitate? Pausing only to place in safety those now hateful objects and letters, which, when I touched them to lock them into my desk, felt as though I held some loathsome reptile in my hand, so that all the blood in my body seemed to flow back to my heart, I got into the

carriage that was waiting ; and, through the quiet sweetness of the summer night, hastened back to a spot which a sad presentiment forewarned me, even more than the letter I had received, I was about to visit for the last time.

What a whirlwind was in my mind ! In spite of the composure I was forced to assume, to visit the house of mourning—the presence, perhaps, of death,—every pulse in my veins was throbbing with one of those tumults of body and soul, which it is fortunately given us to sustain but once or twice in our lives.

Before I ventured to fulfil the purpose for which I was called, of entering the presence of Ethel, I had another short conference with Robson. It was necessary I should ascertain what changes had occurred.

“ The worst, the very worst !—Intelligence had arrived of the death of the infant,—and his poor mistress knew all !”—

I shook my head with a heavy sigh ; not

from agreeing with *him* that *this* was the worst that could happen, but from dread of the interview I was about to encounter.

“No, sir; she is quite calm, quite composed, quite herself *now*!” replied the old servant, in reply to the expression of my fears. “But the doctor says we must not think the better of her state for *that*. He spoke more gravely, just now, about sending for her friends, than I ever heard him yet! It always seems such mockery, sir, when they talk of my poor mistress’s friends.”

Ay, mockery indeed,—poor, helpless, dependent from infancy on the mercies of the world! It was not, however, a moment to unnerve myself by too much pity.

Having caused my arrival to be announced, I waited in uneasy wretchedness till old Mary came to conduct me into the sick room. A chair was already placed for me by the bedside.

“Bring more light,” said the sufferer, in a

voice so changed, that I should never have guessed it to be that of Mrs. Stanley, "bring more light, Mary; I want to see his kind looks once again. I have been wandering so long in darkness! I have seen such threatening faces! Thanks!—" said she, when they placed the lamp on a table near enough to enable us to distinguish each other; and, extending her thin hand towards me, upon which I bowed my face, to conceal the tears which, in spite of all my resolution, fell profusely. "Friend!" continued she—"friend!" (as if repeating the word to herself, for her own pleasure, rather than addressing me) "what a name of comfort!—I wanted to breathe it once again before I died."

Old Mary, who was standing beside us, weeping also, begged me not to let her mistress what she called "take on so." But, knowing that in that "taking on" lay all her solace, I offered no opposition.

"You have been so good to me!" said

she, a moment afterwards, when her strength enabled her again to speak; "so good, so brotherly, so different from all the rest! *Your* heart is as the heart of one who has had a mother he respected, and sisters whom he loved. *You* can think of other things besides money; and from you, therefore, I still hope for support in the discharge of my last duties."

"Everything, my dear Mrs. Stanley — everything and anything in which I can serve you, you may command!" said I, lest she should weary herself by pleading.

"I want you to be my executor," said she, in a still hoarser voice, though faintly endeavouring to smile. "I am going to make my will. You will wonder why I want to make my will; I who have nothing, now that the poor fatherless babe they took from me, is safe — safe and happy with its Father that is in heaven. But the poorest has always some trifle, some tatter, some humble

belonging to bestow; and there are those whose claims upon me are more by love than law. Will you, dear friend—will you undertake this last troublesome office for one who can reward you only by her prayers?"

Need I say how unconditional, how eager was my assent?

"But there is still time to think of this," said I, pressing within my own the poor, feverish hand she made no effort to withdraw. "All you must think of now is the restoration of your strength. All you must think of is rest."

"Yes—*rest!*—But not the rest of this world. *Here* I must yet labour—here I must yet strive.—Only for a season.—My days are done.—My very hours are numbered.—Already, the peace that passeth all understanding is dawning for me.—I see what you cannot see, Percy; I hear what you cannot hear."

Having been previously apprized by Robson

of a mental delusion entertained by Mrs. Stanley, that the spirit of her child was present with her—that it was come to summon her from this world—I was the less surprised when she calmly added—“My babe watches over me now, as once I watched over *him*; and I know that my prayers are heard, and that my appointed hour is come.”

“If you could only prevail on my mistress, Mr. Percy, to take something to support herself, and try to sleep, instead of wearing herself out by talking, it would be such a blessing!” whispered her poor old heart-broken attendant.

“Do not be angry, do not scold me, dear Mary,” said she, drawing the old creature, who had advanced towards the curtain, nearer to her by the sleeve, and resting her head upon her arm, as she had been accustomed to do in her childhood. “This is the last day’s trouble you will ever have with me, Mary; the last—the last!”—

The old woman stooped down and kissed her forehead. The dying woman seemed to have become her child again. The youth of eternity was on her brow. She was entering into a new stage of existence.

“ I will do what you bid me now,” added Mrs. Stanley, as if to reward the fond tears of genuine love that were fast falling on her cheeks. “ I will rest.—It is late—It is midnight.—But you must not let my friend Mr. Percy leave the house. You must show him the room I ordered prepared for him ; for to-morrow the lawyer is to be here. It was too late—he would not come from Windsor to-night. But to-morrow, at daybreak, he will accompany your friend Mr. Barnard, who is to visit me for the last time ; and you will all join with me — will you not? — in accomplishing my last duties of this world.”

Blinded by my tears, I followed the old nurse in silence to my destination ;—con-

vinced that the apprehensions of the dying woman were just, and that if she exerted herself for further conversation, strength might not be vouchsafed her for the discharge of the duties after which her parting soul aspired.

Having been informed by Robson, who was waiting for me in my room, that the clergyman and lawyer had promised to be in attendance at eight o'clock, I dismissed him, on pretence of wishing to sleep, to be prepared for such early rising.

Sleep, however, under such circumstances, how could I!—And I had neither book nor writing materials to beguile the intervening hours. Only my own sad thoughts! Only the bewildering fancies of one who was beginning to doubt whether any thing real, or true, or good, or holy, existed in this self-seeking world!—

Under the consciousness of my own wrongs, —of the dying Ethel's,—I writhed again!—

And then recurred to my memory, as by a sort of fantasmagoric vision, the words I had perused that morning in a London paper—“On Saturday last Mr. and Mrs. Brookes entertained a select dinner party at their splendend mansion in Portland Place. Among the company were—” But why recapitulate the accursed list of Dukes and Lords, to live among whom with appropriate brilliancy of equipage, and a befitting number of rogues in livery, Barty had sold his soul, and sacrificed the peace and well-being of others besides himself!—

I could not bear the glare of the candles—a mere mockery of my want of occupation. Having extinguished them, and drawn aside the curtains, to admit the soft moonlight, so much more soothing to my aching senses, I found that my chamber occupied the side of the old house overshadowed by the fine old cedar-tree, formerly described. A gentle summer breeze was agitating its branches;

and as they rose and fell, a dark shadow, as of funereal plumes, was traced by the moonlight on the white walls of my chamber. Was it an omen?—The supernatural vision described by Walpole in his *Otranto* occurred at that moment to my mind. Alas! what invention of the most poetical human imagination, but has its prototype in the eternal treasury of nature!

At length, weary and exhausted, I threw myself upon the bed in my clothes, lest the sound of my pacing footsteps should disturb the poor sufferer whose room was at no great distance; and having watched those dispiriting shadows upon the wall, till their gentle undulations affected my over-wearied senses, I gradually fell asleep,—a distracted and restless sleep,—but enough to render me unconscious of surrounding objects.

When I woke, Robson was by my side, and the sun shining full into my chamber.

“The gentlemen were already come. Mrs.

Stanley was tolerably composed. They had both been with her these ten minutes."

In ten more, I had joined them.—But I was not sorry to see that her medical attendant had also made his appearance; so that, if the exertions she meditated were too much for her, he was at hand to oppose his veto.

"I have profited by your absence, my dearest friend, to execute a portion of the duty that lies heavy on my hands," said she, as I approached the bedside,—“My last will has been written from my dictation, and awaits only my signature.”

The saddened faces of those surrounding the bed apprized me that, in spite of the firm voice in which she spoke, these preparations were not premature, and that all hope was over.

“What I have now to ask of all present, and especially, doctor, of *you*,” continued she, with impressive steadiness,—“is whether they consider my mind in a sufficiently clear and collected state to execute a valid will?”

“Perfectly so,”—was the unhesitating reply of those to whom she appealed. “And I am prepared to attest it on oath,” was the further confirmation of her medical attendant.

A moment afterwards, she affixed her name to the deed placed before her by the solicitor; and though her tremulous hand had scarcely power to perform the office, the clearness of her purpose was perceptible to all. The man of the law and my friend Barnard, as well as her physician, next added their signatures, as witnesses. *My* assistance she declined, as being interested in the will; which, when duly executed, was placed in her lawyer's custody; and he and the doctor immediately withdrew together. Aware, however, that his patient was about to receive the last consolations of her faith, the latter whispered to me as he passed, that he would not immediately quit the house. From indications I was less able to interpret than himself, he saw that her end was near.

On the dread solemnities that followed, let

me not presume to touch. Suffice it that she requested my permission for the two old servants to share with us the sacred rite, in which I had already proposed to participate. Previous to the administration, in a broken voice and with the unnatural light of death gleaming in her eyes and streaming in feverish patches on her cheek, Mrs. Stanley made a full confession of her fault ;—an act of atonement, — a public pardon-seeking, — that, through humbleness and contrition, her soul might find grace in the sight of her Eternal Judge.

After such a confession, I could not help thinking it an unnecessary show of rigour on the part of my friend Barnard, to demand of her whether she had forgiven her enemies, —whether she cherished no resentment,—even against him to whose cruel desertion she had slightly alluded,—whether she quitted this world in peace with all mankind ?—But I soon rejoiced at his severity. For the look

and voice of angelic meekness—with which she replied in the affirmative—“ that she forgave as she hoped to be forgiven,” will never, *never* be effaced from my memory!—Poor wasted shadowy thing!—And yet crowned at that moment with the ecstatic glory of a saint!

After the last words of the sacred ceremony that followed, she seemed indisposed to speak again. Signing to us that she wished to sleep, she lay down her head upon her pillow,—and never raised it again!—

Having withdrawn at her bidding, as soon as Barnard had taken his departure I joined the doctor, who was sitting on a bench under the cedar-tree, awaiting a summons; and whilst we were still talking of her,—her beauty,—her gentleness,—her edifying penitence and grace,—the window of her room was hastily thrown open by old Mary, calling to us to hasten up.—“ Her mistress was dying.”

Alas! she was not dying,—she was *dead*! —The sleep which she had felt stealing upon her so gradually, was the sleep of death!—

Thank God, it was given to me to look upon her in those first moments of her release! But for *that*, I should never have known to what glory human beauty might attain. Oh! my poor Ethel! Oh, my ill-fated friend! who could gaze upon the heavenly smile that irradiated thy poor wasted face, without thanking Him by whom thy prolonged trials were ordained, that thou hadst at length entered into thy rest!—

Knowing myself to be the delegate of her last will, I was forced to hasten off after the lawyer, who had by this time reached Windsor with it in his possession, that the seal so lately affixed might be broken in his presence. It was necessary to ascertain, without loss of time, her pleasure concerning the disposal of her remains. As I suspected, they were not to lie at Datchet. “I dare not,” was the

tenour of the will, "propose that my grave should be made near the vault of the family I have disgraced. Let me be buried in the churchyard of Old Windsor. Other unfortunates, besides myself, have been admitted there."

Mrs. Stanley probably alluded to the tomb of Perdita.

The other injunctions of the will were dictated in the same lowly spirit. A few family jewels of some value, bequeathed to her by an aunt, were to be sold, and the sum produced expended on a life-annuity for poor old Mary. Robson, who had been liberally provided for by his late master, was requested to accept her watch and desk as a token of grateful regard. The rest of her property, of whatever kind or sort, was bequeathed to me. Out of it, I was to defray her funeral expenses, and become her residuary legatee. The terms of the bequest were those of the utmost affection. She described me as the

friend who had been true to her in adversity as in prosperity,—in sickness as in health,—brother in all but name.

Yes! I had been indeed her brother; and she, the gentlest and best of sisters. When I accompanied old Mary and the nurse into her chamber after she had been placed in her coffin, to look for the last time upon her solemn clay-cold face—my tears fell more for myself than *her*.—The lid was about to close upon the only living being to whom my welfare was more than a matter of indifference.

CHAPTER XIV.

Is she dead ?

Why so shall I be, ere these Autumn blasts
Have blown on the beard of winter.

PROCTOR.

I had torn myself from my sad devotions by her side, and was entering into the necessary particulars with Robson concerning the precautions to be observed to render the funeral (which was to take place on the morrow) as private as possible, when a scared-looking housemaid ushered into the cedar parlour where we were standing a stranger, whose outward man wore the unmistakeable characteristics of the lawyer's clerk.

“ Mr. Robson, I presume ? ” said he, ad-

dressing my companion, without removing his hat in deference to either the gray hair of my companion, or my air of astonishment. "In that case, I am instructed by the executors of Mr. Stanley to apply to you for information concerning the next of kin of his late wife, whose decease we see announced in the newspapers."

"My poor lady had no next of kin," replied the old servant.

"Every body, if born in wedlock, my dear sir, must have a next of kin of some kind or other," replied the clerk with a smile of superiority; "a next of kin, or representative—"

"*This* gentleman is poor Mrs. Stanley's representative," interrupted Robson, mistaking his drift — "her sole executor and legatee."

Off went the hat of the lawyer's clerk. I was not, then, as he had supposed, the undertaker's clerk, arranging the funeral ceremony?

"In that case, sir," said he, turning respectfully towards me, "I may spare myself the trouble of all further inquiries. My business is with you. You will, perhaps, favour my employers (solicitors to the executorship of Mr. Stanley's estate) with the name of your man of business, with whom they will immediately communicate touching the administration to the infant."

Finding myself completely in the dark, I frankly told him so. "What possible business could I have with the executors of Mr. Stanley's estate?"

"Only, sir, that by a sad oversight on his part, one of the frequent fatal results, sir, of a gentleman in a moment of petulance making his own will, instead of consulting his legal advisers, Mr. Stanley took no precautions against so probable a contingency as the death of his posthumous child, during its minority; and no provision being made to the contrary, the whole of his fine fortune, sir, lapsed to

the mother, as sole heir to the infant. Mrs. Stanley's having survived the child a couple of days, will be the means of depriving the brother-in-law of her late husband of something like ninety thousand pounds—ninety thousand pounds, sir, besides the house we are in, and other valuable realties."

"You really mean," said Robson, (for I admit that *I* was too much startled for speech,) "that the whole of my master's property will, after all, escape the fangs of those cruel mischief-making people, whose officious interference drove him into his grave?"

"I mean, Mr. Robson, that every guinea of it belongs to Mrs. Stanley's representative or representatives," replied the clerk, with a deprecating bow towards myself.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Percy, sir, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart!" cried the old man. "God knows I did not think any thing in this world could afford me a moment's pleasure again! But

you deserve it, sir, and twice as much!—Yes! you richly deserve it!—the interposition of Providence has done this, to reward you for all your goodness in this house.”

The lawyer’s clerk, on the contrary, was convinced that it was the interposition of the law which had stood my friend; and the vulgar obsequiousness of his manner attested that he was eager to be considered my friend also. I was too much bewildered, however, to do more than refer him to the solicitor at Windsor, for a sight of Mrs. Stanley’s will, in confirmation of my claims.

Professions of disinterestedness are ever suspicious things. Yet I cannot help relying upon the reader’s belief in my assurance that, at *that* moment, this extraordinary—this unlooked-for—this incredible accession of fortune possessed no charm for me. I had lost everything besides fortune. I had lost the two in whom my soul delighted. My last friend was lying in the chamber overhead—

a shrouded corpse.—What signified money? —What signified silver and gold?—Would they bring back to my ear the dear voices I was to hear no more?—Would they again enclasp in mine the hands whose touch was denied me for ever?—No, no! Riches were mockery *now*!—

Before four-and-twenty hours had elapsed, other thoughts had, of course, possession of my mind. There was some pleasure in thinking of the liberal reward I should be able to bestow on those who had ministered to the last hours of my departed friend; above all, in knowing that a comfortable, happy home would be provided for the old age of poor old Mary.

Nay, it was a satisfaction to think that I had it in my power to raze to the ground the hated walls of Lisbon House, which had witnessed so much care, so much wretchedness! I determined, even before the head of Ethel was laid in the grave, that the

ploughshare should pass over the little garden; that the fountain, with its bubbling mockery, should be overthrown; that even that ominous old cedar-tree should be levelled with the dust—humbled as *she* had been humbled, and like *her* laid low.

My very first interview with the Windsor solicitor, however, gave a new turn to the current of my ideas. Long employed by the late Mr. Stanley for the transaction of local business, he was sufficiently aware of the nature and extent of his property, to wish me joy on having succeeded to a princely fortune. The two thousand a-year bequeathed to old Stanley by his parents had been more than doubled under his administration; and the lawyer began forthwith to enlarge on the value of his client's Buckinghamshire farms, of his canal property, his East India stock, his railway shares, his long annuities, his I know not what; till it appeared to *me* that everything short of the mines of Golconda

was included in this miraculous inheritance. His deference towards me knew no bounds. Instead of a poor Honourable,—a miserable Lieutenant in the Guards,—*I* had progressed into a Man of Capital!—

God forbid that it should transform *me* to the degree in which it had affected the character of Barty Brookes!—

Only a little month before, and how different a train of reflection would have arisen from this unexpected stroke of fortune. To be shared with Harriet, how different an aspect would it have assumed! How much larger, in that case, had been half, than now the whole! God forgive me! I am afraid that my joy, under such circumstances, would almost have reconciled me to the loss of my hapless friend.

It was not, however, till I had presided at the last sacred rites due to her memory, that I suffered myself to give my thoughts to worldly interests. After turning with a

heavy heart from hearing the dust rattled upon her coffin, I had hardly courage to bear the congratulations of my friend, John Barnard, who had been apprized by Robson of my singular change of circumstances.

Rather to get away from the regiment and avoid all chance of coarse allusions on the part of Lord James, than for the purpose of consulting the lawyers, I had already obtained leave of absence ; and on the evening of the funeral, I hurried to town.

Leaving the nightingales singing as though they would burst their throats for joy in the gardens that were now mine, I proceeded, in the fragrant stillness of twilight, to London.

My first visit was to the solicitor of the estate. Yes—I was indeed rich beyond my wildest anticipations. They admitted my right to be unimpugnable. The executors were prepared to take out letters of admi-

nistration to the infant, and make over the property at once. The brother-in-law seemed to feel that his vexation would be eased by getting rid of every trace of the business.

My interviews with these moneyed people had, I cannot deny, a curious influence on my mind. Unaccustomed to hear a fortune spoken of as a mine to be worked, rather than as a blessing to be enjoyed, I had not talked to them an hour before I began to discern a sort of vitality in money. Its procreative power seemed to double its importance.

Who was to limit the extent of its reproduction?—What rich man but might become immediately rich?—For, as the shifts of poverty beget greater poverty, capital is made to beget capital, like the multiplication of some swarming insect tribe.

Alas! instead of sickening at these demonstrations of lucre-love, as only a month previously would have been the case, the theme

was growing pleasant. The discussion appeared to enlighten my eyes on a thousand points hitherto obscure. Prodigious vistas opened suddenly into the mysteries of life. Methought I could see further into the actions and prospects of my fellow-creatures; and I became (will it be believed?) more indulgent even with Barty himself.

Barty, in early life an eyewitness of the supreme interest of financial operations, as well as a participant in the comforts of opulence,—Barty had certainly some little pretext for his endeavours to extricate himself from the miserable poverty into which he had been flung by his relations in order to overgorge the consequence of the head of the family.

Nay, after a second interview with, not the crabbed brother-in-law, self-frustrated of his inheritance, but with the sober, solid, demure, well-spoken Justinian Broadham, Esq., the dissenting member of parliament, I could un-

derstand that, to a family established on the broad basis of thousands per annum, and thousands of acres open to the sun, my wretched substance of a pair of colours and a few hundreds a-year, must have placed me in the light of a despicable Johnny Lackland; so as to render excusable in the eyes of Miss Brookes's friends any attempt, of whatever nature, to save her from throwing herself away on a lot so replete with disgrace.

Doubtless, my old friend Barty *had* done his best to circumvent the match. But he had not acted treacherously! I had been forewarned of his objection to the acquaintance. I had been apprized of his opposition to the intimacy. He had never affected to encourage my attachment. What right, therefore, had I to complain? Though I had largely befriended *him*, it was with my purse, with my strong arm, in getting him out of scrapes and quarrels; and these obligations he had repaid. But when had I ever offered

him a charming sister, to be degraded into his companion for life?—

With such flimsy sophistry did I deceive myself; and having completely satisfied my mind that it was only my want of means to support her as she deserved that had actuated the conduct of her brother, I took a desperate resolution. What had occurred—what had *inevitably* occurred,—might be no less painful to them than to myself. They might be as willing as I was to accept advances made to them under circumstances more propitious.

Without hesitating a moment after this notion had entered my head, I drove straight to Portland Place. In some contingencies, *vivâ voce* explanations are best. I would see Barty. A single glance at his face, while my explanations were making, would satisfy my mind whether the offence offered me were personal, or the mere result of the contrarieties of life.

We were now in the middle of July. On my way toward the west end from Mr. Broadham's house of business in Lombard Street, the Bedford Square purlieus of the town, which I had to traverse, were all but deserted. The Bloomsbury folks, who go into the country to eat strawberries, and see their roses blow, had deserted their town quarters; and the unsophisticated, who prefer sea-bathing, when even the ocean is tepid, were probably at the coast. The Juckeson tribe, I feared, might be at Cowes.

Precisely!—When I reached the number in Portland Place, stigmatized by its fashionable neighbours as "*C'est Selon*," or the "Spice Islands," and described by the newspapers as "the splendid mansion of Mr. Brookes," I saw that it was closed for the season. Not a shutter open,—not so much as the single dining-room window, purporting to indicate that "master is sometimes in town for a day or two, on business."

What would I have given, at that moment, to have found it open and animated!—Half my newly-acquired fortune! Before I got as far as Langham Place on my way to my hotel, however, I turned back; resolved, at least, to inquire Barty's country address, that I might lose no time in writing to him. I already knew that the family was not expected to visit Larch Lodge.

The deaf and dirty housemaid who opened the door, evidently sullen at being interrupted in her "cleaning up," was little disposed to understand or answer. At length she brought me a slip of paper, that had been left for the re-direction of the newspapers; and the next moment I was off, almost at a gallop, towards Charing Cross, to take my place in the mail. Barty and his wife were actually at Oak Hill; and whatever explanations were to be made, might be made in person, and to the united family. For I had a general invitation to the Mandevales—

friendly people,—whose young friends gradually progressed into old friends, and whose steady good will and good nature were unsusceptible of ebb or flow.

Once on the road, by way of keeping up my resolution, I kept congratulating myself on my courage in starting at once, in spite of appointments with solicitors and proctors ; making the business on which depended all the happiness of my future life, its first object. Right pleasant was the cool of the night for travelling ; and my sole companion being a young country clergyman, returning to his cure, after a visit to his relations, with as ample subject for his reveries as I for mine, the journey was undisturbed, save by the occasional starts of a lover's fears.

If, after all, the strange conduct, the strange silence preserved towards me by Harriet, should *not* be the result of compulsion, or even over-persuasion,—if she should be changed,—if she should have ceased to love

me?—But no—it was *impossible*!—Such overweening affection as mine *could* not have begotten a slight attachment in return. She *must* dearly love, she must *still* love the man who prized that preference beyond all the other objects of existence! Fortune, fame, condition,—every thing but honour—would I have sacrificed at any moment without demur, to have secured her precious love!—

And if I had thought and felt this at Windsor, or in London, how much more, as every step we advanced, drew me nearer towards *her*!—That well-remembered road! The last time I traversed it, six months before, what heart-beating hours were those consumed in the journey!—How I then considered and reconsidered the little cadeaux I had brought her; and though I had admired them at the moment of purchase, discovered, as our interview approached, how unworthy they were of being offered!

But what I experienced on my former

journey was light as a feather, compared with the emotions that distracted me now—*now* that I was come to say, “Not even your unkindness, beloved, has availed to alienate my affection! I am come again, to grovel at your feet—I am come again, to say, be my wife, my friend, my household ruler!—I am come again, opulent and independent; and all I have is yours.—Dispose of it—dispose of *me*! —But, in return, restore me that cherished place in your heart, which, Heaven knows, I have done nothing to forfeit!”—

Lucky for me, perhaps, that the mail stopped nearly twenty miles from the secluded neighbourhood of Oak Hill; so that I had nearly three hours’ posting before me, when, at eight in the morning, I took leave of my companion. There needed the open face of day, and the irritation of provokingly stupid postboys, to restore me to myself. Neither bribery nor threats would induce them to risk their horses, or their necks.

It was, consequently, about eleven before I reached the village I had to traverse. The breakfast hour of Oak Hill was long past. Who knows but I might catch a glimpse of Harriet's white dress in the garden; or perhaps encounter Barty himself, with his fishing-tackle, making his way to one of the finest trout-streams in England.

"Get on!" cried I, as in the very centre of the village, towards the church, the post-boys thought proper to slacken their pace, as postboys do in villages, to receive nods of recognition from the cottage doors.—"How many times must I tell you to get on!"—

But, having put my head out of the window, to add due force to my exhortations, I perceived that the obstacle which impeded our way, or rather the obstacle to which the boys and horses seemed disposed to concede some reverence, was a profusion of flowers upon the road. As far as the eye could reach, roses and acacia blossoms scattered

upon the summer dust;—that is, *not* as far as the eye could reach, but as far as the church porch.—There, the shower of blossoms ended; and I now perceived that the cracked bells of the old church were jangling a merry peal.

A wedding—a wedding of some moment,—an event as rare in that quiet neighbourhood as it was auspicious.—*A wedding!*—My heart danced within me at the very name!

But while uttering my outcry to the post-boy, my face had been recognized in the village. A certain Joe Hanson, an old favourite of mine, as one of Mandevale's under-keepers whom I had formerly tipped handsomely to secure me a good place in the coverts, stepped forward, hat in hand, to the chaise-window, to welcome me to Suffolk.

“But you're too late, Cap'n!” said he, evidently a little the worse for early cheer, “you're *just* too late! The weddingers, and the rest of the grand folks, was off for the

Park half an hour ago. Sure you must have heard the two fieldpieces, Cap'n, as the keepers let off at the North Lodge, when the carriages started from the door?"

"*What* weddingers, Joe, — *what* grand folks?" said I: a horrible presentiment all but strangling my utterance.

"My lord and Miss Harriet, Cap'n. I thought, maybe, you was come for the wedding. Sure," added he, misinterpreting my look of blank consternation, "sure you remember the young lady as bides with old Madame Brookes, up at Oak Hill?"—

"She was married this morning, then, to Lord Donnington?"

"Why, don't your honour hear the *bells*?" cried Joe, by way of reply. "There was a power of fine folks in the church. The Park family, in course; and the widdy lady from The Danes; and Miss Harriet's rich brother, from Lon'on, with his young wife; and Sir Richid and *his* lady, from the North; and a

deal more,—bridesmaids and bridesmen, and what not ; and they say Miss Harriet's to have a place at court, and will eat on gold and silver, all as one as a queen !”

With a vague, foolish smile, I asked him for a glass of water, and having enforced with a sovereign my request that he would not mention to any living soul at the Hall, or Oak Hill, having seen me, bade the postboys resume the high road, and make for the nearest post-town, at about two miles' distance.

“ Stop !” said I, as they were about to crack their whips for departure, (probably considering their inconsistent customer fit only for a strait-waistcoat) and beckoning Joe again to the window, I made him pick up for me one of the faded flowers from the road.

He offered, of course, to bring me a fresh rose from the nearest cottage-garden, in place of the faded thing, bespoiled with dust, which he placed in my hand, and for which he refused to accept the further gratuity I flung

him.—How little did he dream, poor fellow, what that flower was to *me*!—I have kept it ever since!—So long as I live—not long, perhaps—it shall have a place near my heart!

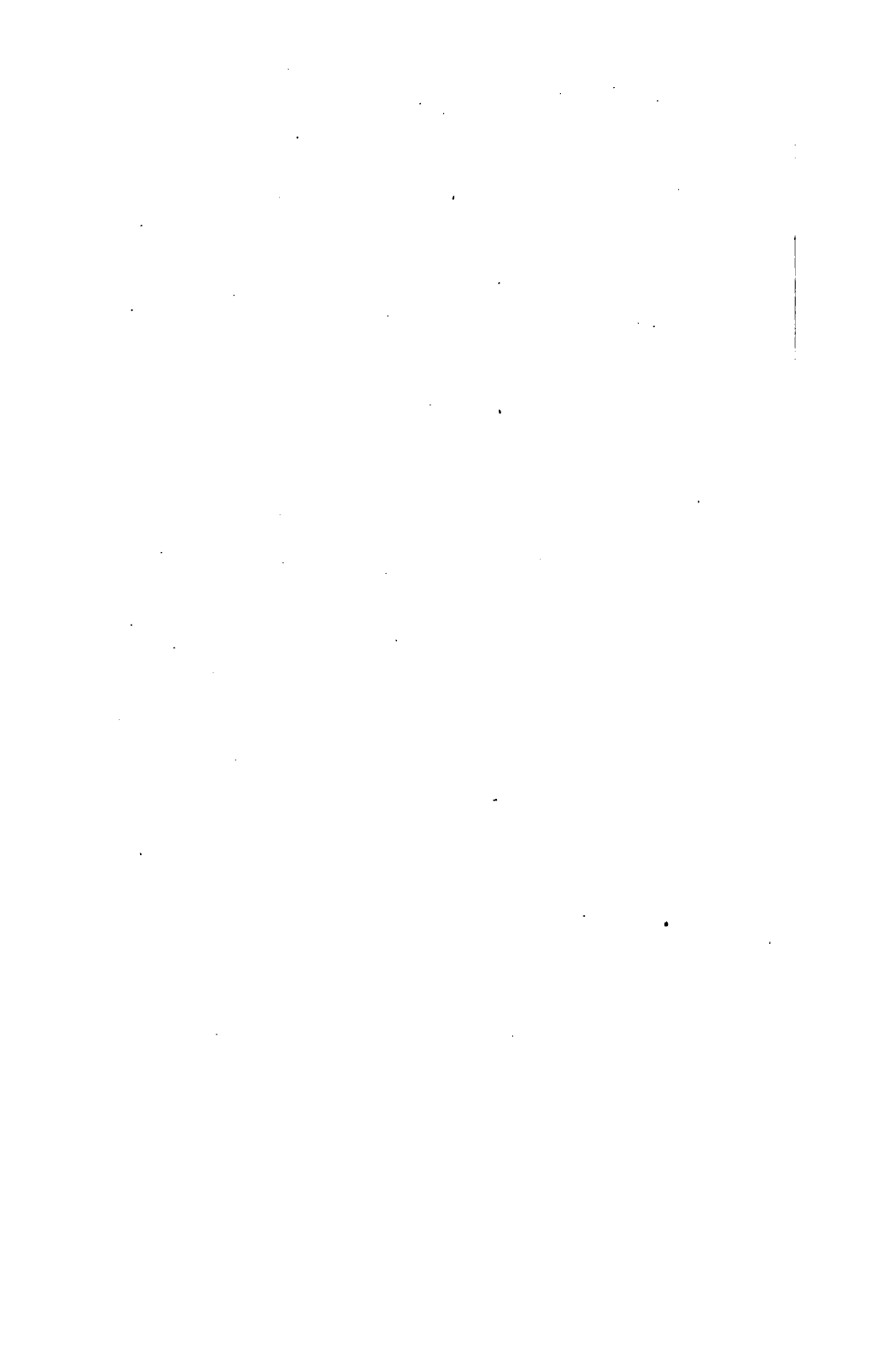
Such is my friend's simple version of a tale of every-day occurrence, yet replete with the foul treacheries engendered by lucre-love; for need it be added, that the false representations of Mr. Brookes had induced the precipitate act of his sister? Little exaggeration had sufficed to convince her, that the devoted attentions of poor Percy, at Datchet, were addressed to the fair widow and her jointure, rather than to the sad widow and her death-bed!

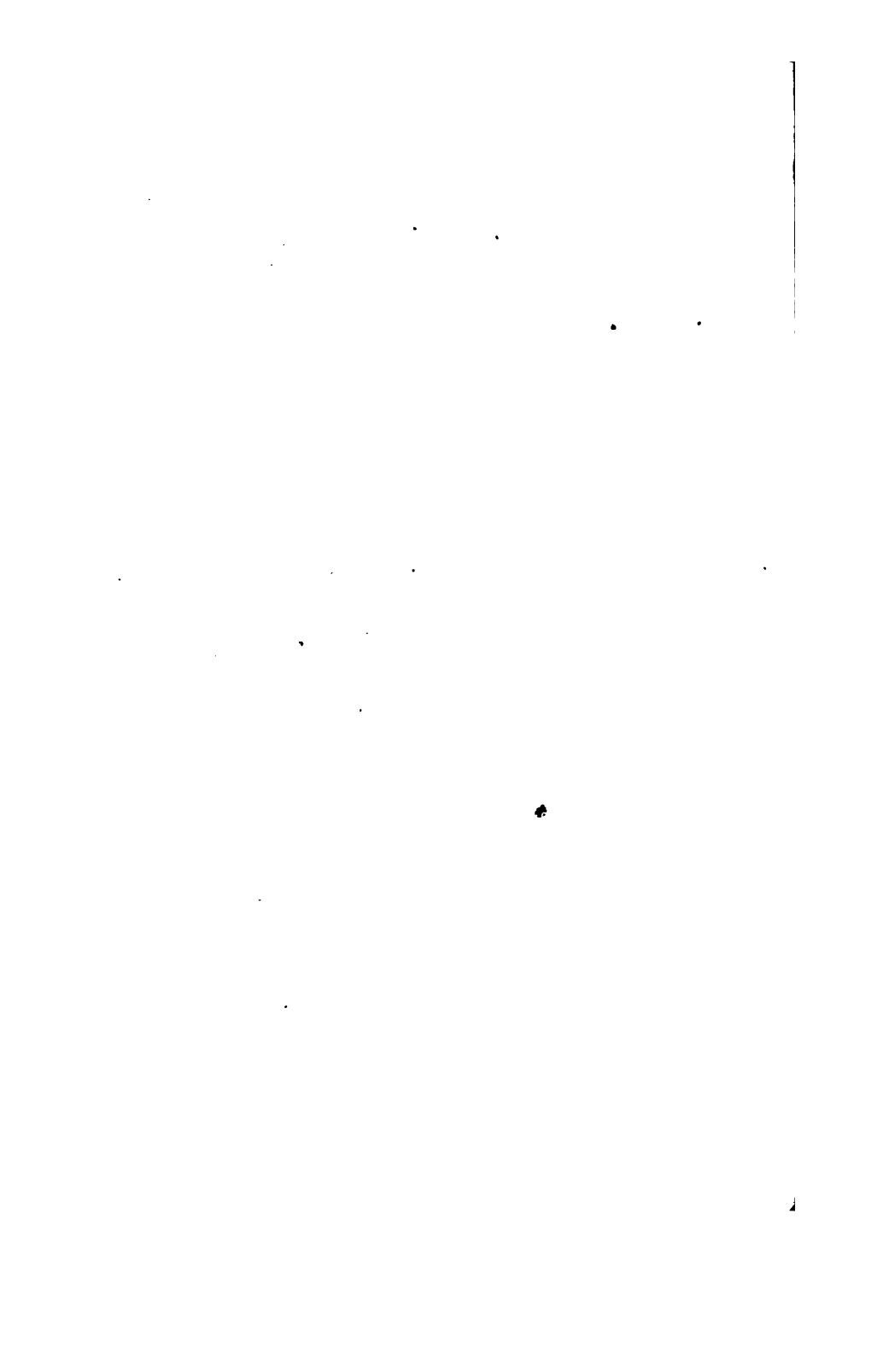
Convinced that she was betrayed, she had been tempted to betray in her turn. Between Lady Georgiana Trench, who had set her heart on making the warm-hearted, ingenuous Percy, her own, and Barty, who considered his sister's disdain of Donnington

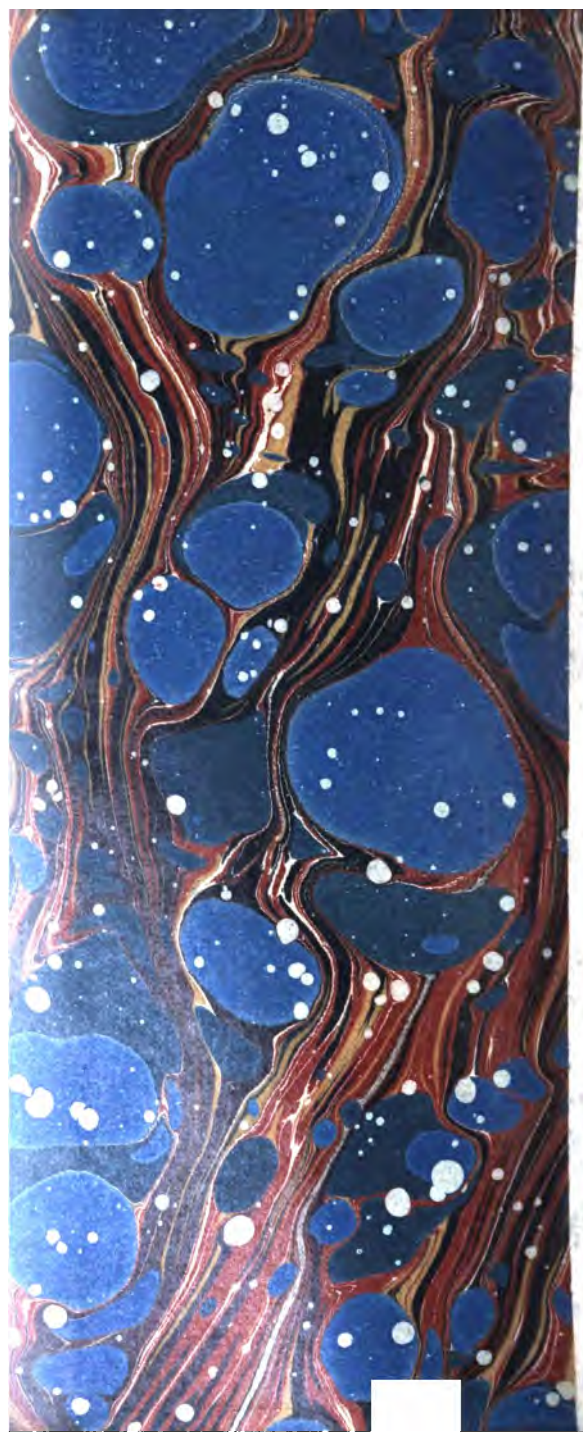
Castle and twenty thousand a year, a folly, nay, a crime, which her family would be unpardonable in sanctioning,—the mild, inexperienced girl was sacrificed for life!—

For life?—Alas! her penance was not of long duration. *Too* long, however, for she lived to be undeceived.—She lived to learn the truth.—It was not till the summer of the following year, that the grass was growing upon her grave!—

END OF VOL. I.









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